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Mediating Metamodernity in Bulgarian Cultural Production: An Exploratory Case Study of Klaxon Press Collective

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Mediating Metamodernity in Bulgarian Cultural Production: An Exploratory Case Study of Klaxon Press Collective

by

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Dedication

For my parents, who have always encouraged my curiosity.

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Abstract

Mediating Metamodernity in Bulgarian Cultural Production: An Exploratory Case Study of Klaxon Press Collective

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This exploratory case study will examine the way in which Klaxon Press Collective, a new independent media producer in Bulgaria, is reflexively re-presenting and re-imagining the identity of their local community during a period of socio-political flux. The study strives to gain a preliminary understanding of the characteristics of the Collective's imagined "metamodern" Bulgarian identity as they are manifested both in Klaxon's material cultural production as well as the organization's structure, goals, collaborations, and live events. A non-profit art collective and small press, Klaxon positions itself as part of a larger cultural transformation taking place in Sofia, Bulgaria. This process of transformation is evidenced by the country's admittance to the EU in 2007 and the extensive 2013 protests and national political instability. While explicitly placing themselves within this politicized context, Klaxon Press Collective has come together to further art as a business and the development of a creative community within the Bulgarian capital. The organization's espoused goal, to serve as a distribution platform for young Bulgarian and International artists, and more broadly, to support the promotion of a

progressive mode of thought that they dub “metamodernism” within Bulgarian society suggests a unique connection between the imagination of communal identity, social transformation, and artistic media production. It is this connection between context, cultural identity, and artistic production that this interdisciplinary study seeks to investigate through the study of KPC’s extant web content and premiere publication via the application of multiple methodological approaches including document, organizational, and literary analysis.

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Introduction

PERSONAL FORWARD

I arrived in Bulgaria out of a combination of intent and happenstance. With an interest in Eastern Europe and a background English Literature I pursued a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) grant upon finishing my undergraduate education. Though Bulgaria was not initially my selected nation of interest, I was recruited by the Bulgarian Fulbright commission and, by August of that year, I was searching for an apartment in Sofia. I lived there for eleven months and during that time taught English language and literature at the First English Language School. Despite initial challenges, including language barriers and culture shock, I developed a close relationship with my colleagues and students and a deep attachment to the city of Sofia and Bulgarian culture. Working with the students was definitively a collaborative learning process, as, despite my role as teacher, they schooled me in Bulgarian language and youth culture. Over the course of the year, I became fascinated by how they saw the world, and how they saw themselves in it. I also grew keenly aware of the way in which this youthful perception was changing – becoming distinctly different from previous generations (and even some of their peers). While this kind of identity formation is nothing shocking for 18 year olds to engage in, in witnessing it, I became profoundly invested in their future and the future of their community. Thought our friendship, their works, and our discussions, I caught glimpses of their world as they understood it, and I wanted to know more.

My stint in Sofia lasted from 2010 through 2011, and during this time, it became increasingly clear to me that Bulgaria was a nation in transition, though there was some general confusion as to what it was transitioning towards. Since its admission to the European Union in 2007, Bulgaria had faced several challenges. The global recession of 2008 hit hard – foreign investment dried up and morale appeared generally low ("Bulgaria to say in recession," 2010). Particularly pertinent to my work as a teacher was the apparent brain drain of well-educated youth from Bulgaria despite the efforts of government to prevent such a phenomenon (Kekic, 2006; Kavidova, 2006). Many of my students (who were being educated at a nationally top ranked school) were excited to pursue their higher education abroad in Scotland, Austria, Finland, the UK, and Germany. As their teacher I encouraged them to pursue their academic aspirations despite my awareness of the impact of their leaving upon their local community. However, when May and graduation finally rolled around and discussions of the future became a regular occurrence, I was pleasantly surprised to hear many of these same students express a desire to return home post university in order to "make a difference" in Sofia. Though perhaps a statement of eighteen year old idealism, it did, regardless, suggest a hope for change and empowerment that has been relatively absent from Bulgarian society and politics – where apathy and cynicism are often perceived as part of the national character ("Post-postmodernism", 2012; Stoyanov, 2006, p. 143).

This is not without good reason, as promises of change over the past few decades have been largely unrealized and the historical opportunity for legitimately empowered independence minimal (Bideleux & Jefferies, 2006, p. 106-107). This became clear when,

during my first few weeks in Bulgaria, I attended a conference in Bansko where we were given a presentation on Bulgarian history. Much was made of the ancient history, the tombs of the Thracian kings, and the Bulgarian kingdom of the 7th century. Fast forward to the 15th-20th century however, and what appears is a history of political subjugation of varying extents, from the Ottoman Empire to the failed revolution of the 1860s, the concomitant dominating influence of the USSR under communist rule for decades, and finally, contemporary corruption and dysfunction. Rarely has Bulgaria been able to develop an autonomous identity. I witnessed the social ramifications of this troubled and complex history on a daily basis as I watched as friends and coworkers did their best to work around frustrating bureaucracy and systems they viewed as corrupt; often sharing anecdotes detailing the less than subtle ways in which the criminal element retained a hold on power that, while not equal to the blatant "insurance" rackets of the mid 1990s, was nonetheless still impactful (Daskalov, 1998, p. 25). However, I also witnessed inspiring things – spontaneous concerts of travelling and local musicians in Borisova Gradina, humorous personal stories of minor (but symbolic) resistance under communism through rock and roll, tales about the politics of Levis jeans during that era, and a burgeoning arts scene, in which I quickly involved myself.

With a background in literature, I pursued a position as an intern and English language editor for a local arts and culture magazine - a bi-lingual publication featuring local and international artists and art spaces. They hosted events, at which I was exposed to the local art community as well as many expats and international visitors who were also involved in the scene. It was clear that this element was alive and well in Sofia - an

interconnected and relatively young community of artists, who, while often not explicitly political, differed from the frustrated expectations of the mainstream. It was this dynamic scene that I was most sad to leave upon my departure from Sofia. The past cultural resistance undertaken via the underground scene (against Communist regimes) in many Eastern European countries, including Bulgaria, has been relatively well documented in academic scholarship (Collin, 2001; Ashley & Ramet, 1994). However, it quickly became clear to me that less attention is paid to the transformation of these systems and their present day state. Perhaps with the end of the Communist Era, it seems that there is no longer a cohesive mainstream to resist against, or that now that the times have changed, societal relations, including those of art and politics, will continue along a more familiar (i.e. Western capitalist) trajectory. While in some ways this may be true, my time in Bulgaria illustrated to me that an artistic response to political issues was no less potent than the anecdotal descriptions I had heard of listening to Zeppelin during the Communist Era. They may no longer be reacting against an explicitly structured communist regime (that I will argue, was deeply rooted in aesthetic values), but there are still plenty of challenges for individuals to respond to and the arts continues to serve as a conduit for this dissent.

During my year in Sofia, one of the more momentous and visible instances of this artistic dissent occurred on June 17th, 2011 and even received international news coverage. Grabbing headlines as the "Banksy of Bulgaria" (Allen, 2011, p. 1), an anonymous graffiti artist had struck overnight and painted over one of the largest and most prominent monuments in town. Known colloquially as "the Russian Monument", the structure was created to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Russian liberation of Bulgaria in

1944, at the end of the Second World War. The monument had been a longstanding part of Sofia's landscape, literal and cultural. Since the end of communism it has incited debate amongst many parties (Kelleher, 2009, p. 61-62). It sits imposingly in the center of the capital, prominently displayed at the entrance of Borisova Gradina (or Boris's Garden) and had, despite its imposing proportions and military gravitas, begun to serve as a common home to cigarette smoking teenagers and their skateboarding antics – who first re-appropriated the area and built a skate ramp in the early to mid-90s (Kelleher, 2009, p. 62). Though that might seem symbolic in and of itself, the co-called "Bulgarian Banksy" raised the stakes by painting the soldiers depicted on the side of the monument as popular American icons. Soviet soldiers were transformed into the likes of Ronald Macdonald, Captain America, Superman, the Joker, and many others. Emblazoned above the figures was the phrase "moving along with the times."

INTRODUCTION

The focus of my study, Klaxon Art Collective and Press (KPC) is dedicated to providing "a forum for emerging local and international artists, photographers, writers, poets, and their ideas" ("Home," 2014). According to their Canadian-Bulgarian Creative Director Monica Georgieff, while the Klaxon Collective had begun organizing events and developing its initial web presence (as a blog or online zine) as of 2012, the idea for the expansion of the organization through the development of the Klaxon Press came about in the midst of the freezing Canadian winter of January 2014. Born out of her passion for creative industries, her involvement in cultural production in Bulgaria, and desire to develop the cultural arts scene in Sofia, Georgieff soon established a team of "creative

elite" (The Team, 2014), the collective's digital presence, and went to work on the team's inaugural publication, the *Klaxon Press Journal*, which was published in September of 2014. Klaxon Press aspires to publish two books, twice a year, as well as a quarterly magazine ("Home," 2014), and is sponsored financially by the University of Sofia. Thanks to the university's support, Klaxon's publications are available online and in print free of charge. To help fulfill their aim of facilitating dialogue and to "create a platform connecting young writers and artists," the publication is bi-lingual, and the Klaxon Press website is primarily written in English (though Bulgarian translations are increasingly available and all current content is written by Sofia-based contributors).

With Klaxon Press Collective as my primary object or "field" of focus, I undertook an exploratory study which endeavored, through qualitative analysis, to provide insight into the role of the arts within the Bulgarian context, how they were being mobilized (with specific emphasis on artistic engagement of communal imagination), and to what end. As such, I hoped that a study of KPC could provide an avenue through which to observe and understand the cultural changes occurring in Sofia as well as a potential locally envisioned outcome. This project was driven by both personal and academic interest, as it was my own concern and investment in Sofia and Bulgarian culture that has prompted me to examine, via a case study of Klaxon Press Collective, the potential of the arts for effecting transformation within imagined communities (Anderson, 1982) and how they might afford us a unique perspective on cultural change. More specifically, how can this potential, and its imagined outcomes be understood, applied, and manifested within the case of Sofia and KPC?

Such an undertaking was not without challenges and limitations. Though many have noted the reflexive and transformative power of media in relation to identity articulation and the importance that media organizations, press and/or cultural production can play in the development and iteration of communal identity (Atton, 2002; Anderson, 1991; Bourdieu, 1993; Collin, 2001; Downing, 2001; Duncombe, 2008; Hall, 1996; Hebdige, 1976), Bulgarian media has rarely been the subject of such critical examination. This is unfortunate, as civic developments within Bulgaria and the accompanying shifts in cultural climate indicate that Bulgaria, its industries, identity, development, and culture, merit critical scrutiny. In particular, such scrutiny would help to fill a comparative void in readily available work the contemporary role of arts media in Bulgaria. This absence can be attributed to a number of reasons, including linguistic differences, shifting political regimes, and the fact that a great deal of "unofficial" (i.e. alternative or non-Communist) Bulgarian media history was undocumented (Lutzkanova-Vassileva, 2009). Thus, what work does exist on media within Bulgaria focuses primarily on the state or mainstream commercial producers (Ibroscheva, 2009; Ibroscheva, 2013; Buchanan, 2007) As articulated by scholar Albena Lutzkanova-Vassileva, this lack of historical context for Bulgarian media beyond the mainstream means that "any discussion of unofficial media in Bulgaria takes place in an informational void" (2009, p. 59).

Furthermore, what extant literature is available on media, the arts, and Bulgarian culture more generally is plagued with problematic shortcomings such as limited scope or the application of theoretical frameworks rooted in Western thought, which do not sufficiently address the unique history and context of the Bulgarian community. I

intentionally framed this investigation as a multi-methodological case study (with an emphasis on descriptive qualitative methods) in the hopes of developing a grounded analytical perspective that draws from the localized emergent practices and traits of Klaxon Press. Specifically, within this study, I aim to understand what is happening in Bulgarian culture within the interrelated spheres of art and politics (as reflected in this group's artistic output), as well as why and how the arts are functioning as a means of articulating or manifesting larger changes within Bulgarian culture (again as reflected in KPC's thinking and artistic production).

In exploring the relationship between art and Bulgarian identity imagined by Klaxon Press with such an emphasis on context, I strive to avoid the standard reductionist reading of the Bulgarian "mentalities" that has been noted by many scholars of the region (Stoyanov, 2006; Bideleux & Jeffries, 2006). In their 2006 work, *The Balkans: a Post-Communist History*, Jefferies and Bideleux critique the "often crude, arrogant and profoundly ignorant generalizations about the so-called Balkan 'mentalities', 'attitudes' and 'mind-sets' which emanate mainly (though not exclusively) from Western observers" (2006, p. 10). Such generalizations frame the challenges faced by Balkan nations as "congenital to the people of the Balkan peninsula", and it is such a crude approach that I seek to dismiss (2006, p.10). Though this project, as it is concerned with identity and the imagination of communities in transition, will inevitably deal with the conceptualizations of Bulgarian identity and nation, I place an emphasis upon the local articulation and manifestation of traits of the communal imaginary and argue, like Bideleux and Jeffries, that

> it is both sounder and more fruitful to treat them as relatively malleable 'dependent variables', especially as responses to log-standing or deeply entrenched power relations, power structures, and structures of opportunities and incentives which are capable of being changed by sufficiently persistent and determined policies, actions, and reforming elites. (2006, p. 9-10)

In taking this approach, I have drawn upon guiding theoretical frameworks like Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1979/1984) that seek to elucidate the manner in which institutional systems, individual actions, agency, and identities are linked, and enable the exploration of this linkage in a constructive and non-reductive manner. Within this research, I aspire to privilege the content, processes, and articulations of Klaxon Press Collective in the hope of more sensitively positioning the politics of the artistic cultivation of a communal imaginary within its specific context.

With the aforementioned challenges in mind, this investigation drew upon ethnographic field notes in conjunction with literature in the fields of alternative media, cultural studies, sociology, and political aesthetics in order to pose the following primary research questions:

- How, through engagement with the arts, is Klaxon Press Collective articulating, re-imagining, manifesting contemporary social and cultural change?
- How do they understand their context and the changes occurring in Bulgaria?
- How do they understand their role as a small press/art collective within or in relation to those changes?
- What future do they envision? What community do they imagine? What identity do they articulate and why?

The following analysis proposes that, based upon the resultant data of this study, Klaxon Press Collective perceives and utilizes the arts as a crucial reflexive space that allows for the re-presentation of a communal cultural imaginary, which in turn assists with the

formulation and presentation of alternative modes of identification, action, and relation as embodied in their concept of metamodernity.

Literature Review

Art & Society

In developing this exploratory study, I desired to take a holistic approach, for, as Bourdieu (1993) notes, the value and meaning of literary and artistic works, or works of cultural production are, on a fundamental level, inextricable from the field of power and position takings that constitutes its context, and thus art must be understood as "a manifestation of the field as a whole" (p. 37). In endeavoring to understand the work of Klaxon Press Collective, I will, in this literature review, and furthermore, within my analysis, take an interdisciplinary approach that includes scholarship on sociology (Giddens, 1991; Bourdieu, 1979/1984), art and aesthetics (Meskimmon, 2010; Papastergiadis, 2012; Sartwell, 2010), alternative media literature (Downing, 2001; Duncombe, 2008; Atton, 2002), literary studies (Schwab, 2010), and concepts of modernity, postmodernity (Gratton & Manoussakis, 2007; Taylor, 2007; Rundell, 2007) and imagined communities (Anderson, 1982). By including all of the aforementioned works, I hope to benefit from the way in which each body of literature contributes to a study of KPC, its context, and its productions, as well as illustrate the benefits of bringing these fields into conversation with one another. I will not devote time to all of these works here, rather, within this introductory literature review I will cover foundational concepts, which will then be fleshed out in application within my analysis, where I will then address ideas that do not receive within this section.

This study is primarily informed by two generative theoretical frameworks which, aided in initially positioning art in relation to society and social change. Specifically, I will be engaging Anthony Giddens' theories of structuration and modernity and the sociological works of Pierre Bourdieu, with an emphasis on cultural production. These frameworks, when engaged loosely, work well together, as they emphasize the transformative influence of social structures, but also emphasize the manner in which individual agents within these systems utilize individual agency to alter or reproduce social structure. Giddens' theory of structuration emphasizes both structure and agency, rejecting the primacy of one or the other (a decided move away from a Marxist base/superstructure approach). Similarly, Bourdieu, in his analysis of the reproduction of social structure, recognizes the role of environments in shaping agents, but also the manner in which, in turn habituated agents act to reinforce particular fields within society. In doing so, he "constructs a "general theory of practices that combines both material and symbolic dimensions and thereby emphasizes the fundamental unity of social life" (Navarro, 2006, p. 14). In his work, *Distinction*, Bourdieu identifies a variety of forms of capital that are all engaged, in accordance with habitus (i.e. a durable set of socially inculcated dispositions that generate both practices and perceptions) (Johnson & Bourdieu, 1993, p. 3). However, he rejects a hierarchization of these forms – as well as the existence of an "overarching organizing principle which would delineate the relations between what he terms social fields. According to Bourdieu, all fields are located within a "meta-field" of power "that organizes differentiation and struggles through all fields" (Navarro, 2006, p. 18). From a Bourdeiusian perspective, all "social formations are structured by way of a hierarchically organized series of fields, each

defined as a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force independently of those of politics and the economy…it is a dynamic concept in that a change in the agent's positions necessarily entails a change in the field's structure" (Johnson, 1993, p. 7). In conjunction, they allow for a nuanced examination of actors, their social setting, and their enactment of agency and negotiation of power relations.

Art & Power

The manner in which both Giddens and Bourdieu explore concepts of structure and agency within the constitution of society highlights the construction, maintenance, and reproduction of power relations. In this respect, their explorations are fundamentally political endeavors. Within such a foundationally political approach, culture "necessarily embodies power relations" (Navarro, 2006, p. 15). For Bourdieu in particular, cultural production entails the negotiation and reproduction of the symbolic systems which anchor and determine human understanding of reality and therefore mediate social practice and relations to institutionalized powers. It is for this reason that he demands that we must acknowledge culture as "not only the very ground for human interaction" but also as an "especial terrain of domination" (Navarro, 2006, p. 15). Bourdieu, though unique in his quantitative approach and thoroughness to studying the politics of culture, is by no means alone in identifying this field, and in particular, cultural production and the arts, as crucial space in the negotiation of power. Though differing from Bourdieu in his Marxist influences, Antonio Gramsci also identified culture as such a "terrain of domination" in his explication of the role of cultural hegemony in the maintenance of class dominance (1971, p. 67). In his work, *Society of the Spectacle*, Situationist theorist Guy Debord concurrently

identified culture as a hegemonic force – one which, through aestheticization becomes "the spectacle" which in turn, dominates society through the inculcation of false consciousness and simulation (1967/2000).

In service to hegemony, art, aesthetics, and their means of production serve to reify, maintain, and reproduce power relations. Alternative media scholarship has, historically (and as suggested by the field's title), focused its efforts on studying media that is defined by its relationship, i.e. alterity in comparison to this mainstream that cultural hegemony constitutes within with realm of cultural and media production (Atton, 2002). Scholars such as Downing (2001), Atton (2002), and Duncombe (2008) have discussed the role of aesthetics, or more specifically, style (Hebdige, 1979) and representation as being key sites for the expression of alterity within alternative media. In a related vein, philosopher Jacques Ranciere recognizes power politics as having an inherently aesthetic dimension. Defining aesthetics as, "the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience..., a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (Rancière & Rockhill, 2013, p. 8) Ranciere frames power politics as notions of recognition or "visibility" within society. More specifically, his concept of "the distribution of the sensible" (2013, p. 22) argues that the power relations are constructed and expressed in aesthetic regimes, or forms of social organization, which strictly delineate and determine forms of visibility or perception (Ranciere & Rockhill, 2013; Ranciere & Corcoran, 2010). It is the aesthetic distribution of the sensible that determines "what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak,

around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (2013, p. 8). In his work on political aesthetics, Crispin Sartwell, also argues for the recognition of the aesthetic dimension of politics, stating that, "no fundamental political, ethical, and epistemic value can be fully delineated – in no case can its content as a concept and a norm be fully characterized – without recourse to aesthetic categories" (Sartwell, 2010, p. 49). Though the political nature of aesthetics is well documented in all of these fields, it is Bourdieu who clearly articulates the impact of the arts and aesthetics upon individuals in his concept of the *aesthetic disposition* which describes the unique affordances (and perhaps, insidiousness) of aesthetics and their political influence. According to Bourdieu (1979/1984), the development of the aesthetic disposition exemplifies the "internalization of externality and the externalization of internality"(Bourdieu, 1977, p.72) (allowing for a naturalization of the power relations at work in aesthetic judgement that allows for the reproduction of power structures, not despite of, but via acts of individual agency) associated with habitus, that clearly distinguishes the different classes by legitimizing forms of consumption on aesthetic grounds.

Art, Aesthetics & Resistance

Thus, despite its all too often complicity in maintaining hegemonic power relations, Bourdieu recognizes that the field of cultural production retains the potential to transform and counter these influences. Due to their lack of organizing principle (beyond their placement within the overarching field of power) slight disjunctures exist between fields, allowing each (and the field of cultural production in particular) a degree of agency and autonomy that can be galvanized during periods of social change. It is for this reason that

"whenever a given society changes and develops through social differentiation and growing complexity, culture and symbolic systems may become relatively autonomous arenas of struggle for difference vis-à-vis other fields" (Navarro, 2006, p. 15). This also bequeaths to cultural producers a unique form of social influence, as "The fact remains that the cultural producers are able to use the power conferred on them, especially in periods of crisis, by their capacity to put forward a critical definition of the social world, to mobilize the potential strength of the dominated classes and subvert the order prevailing in the field of power" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 44). This subversion of the prevailing order may take many forms, but for our purposes, it is worthwhile to note that within cultural production and the arts, this subversion occurs not only via the critique and disruption of the status quo, but through the constructive imagination and manifestation of alternatives, as with the kind of alternative cultural production we are observing here within KPC.

Arguably, it is this imaginative engagement that affords the artistic sphere its prefigurative potential and reputation for prescience in relation to social change: Art historian Nikos Papastergiadis points out that

> ...Sociologists have frequently turned to art in order to glimpse the rise of emergent practice and marveled at the capacity of artists to morph vague ideas into comprehensible forms. Cultural critics have also noted the incontrovertible dynamic by which the margin modifies the centre, and political commentators have observed that the premonitions expressed by artists often point to major institutional shifts. In short, we have become accustomed to examining the influence of social forces on art, and we persist with the vanguardist claim that artists often anticipate social changes. (Papastergiadis, 2012, p. 13)

However, this apparent prescience is by no means inexplicable as many scholars have explored the ways in which art and cultural production can play a role in community

identification and social transformation. In his work, *The Concept of Fiction*, Saer characterizes literature as a kind of "speculative anthropology" (1991; Schwab, 2012, p. 1), a term which Schwab argues, "highlights literature's imaginary ways of remaking language and the world, shaping not only culture, but also, and more directly, the cultural imaginary" (2012, p. 2). In her work, *Imaginary Ethnographies*, Schwab similarly argues that

> texts write culture by inventing a language that redraws the boundaries of imaginable worlds and by providing thick descriptions of the desires, fears, and fantasies that shape the imaginary lives and cultural encounters of invented protagonists [and] rewrite cultural narratives … [using] alternative signifying practices and bold refigurations to undo cultural iconographies and unsettle the status quo of habitual cultural codes. (2012, p. 2)

The critical impact and constitutive potential of material culture, including literature (both fiction and non-fiction) is also highlighted by Benedict Anderson in his work *Imagined Communities*. In it, he points out that it was products of print capitalism, such as the novel and the newspaper, which made it possible for the rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways (Anderson, 1982, p. 36). Specifically, these forms provided the "the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation" (1982, p. 25) in a way that commanded, and continues to command "profound emotional legitimacy" (1982, p 4).

Though Anderson's engagement with the role of cultural production in the constitution of collective identity and imagined communities explores these ideas on the macro level, they are equally represented and visible on a smaller scale. On a micro level, the socially transformative potential of cultural production is noted by Stephen Duncombe

(2008) who observes this potential within the zine community, as well as by alternative media scholar Christopher Atton, who argues that this is a defining characteristic of alternative media. Specifically, Atton believes alternative media can be described as "reflexive instruments of communication practices in social networks," that emphasize a focus on "process and relation" (2002, p. 30). While contextually dependent and measurable in relative degrees, Atton's definition of alternative media also requires that "social relations stand to be transformed through radical communications processes at the same time as the media (the vehicles) themselves stand to be transformed (visually, aurally, distributively)" (Atton, 2002, p. 25). Here, we observe that these imagined alternatives are by no means strictly ephemeral, but capable of being socially constituted via an aligned alteration of practices, often entailing a transcendence of traditional process of production which strictly delineate producers from consumers. The work of alternative media scholars in this area provides a valuable parallel to art history scholar Martha Meskimmons's argument that, "There is a critical shift from asking what artworks show us about the world to asking how they enable us to participate in, and potentially change, the parameters through which we negotiate the world" (2010, p. 6).

The element of critical reflexivity that Atton indicates is one of the most crucial prerequisites for the transformation of social structure. It reasserts the pertinence of Giddens and Bourdieu, as within both of their frameworks, critical awareness and reflexivity allows for the most effective employment of individual agency. For Giddens, reflexivity is demanded both by modern institutions, in which it takes the form of "the regularized use of knowledge about circumstances of social life as a constitutive element

in its organization and transformation" (1991, p. 20), as well as by the equally reflexive modern project of self-identity (Giddens, 1991). While Bourdieu's analysis is primarily focused on the reproduction of social structures, academic proponents of his theory argue that when combined with a critical reflexivity and self-awareness a Bourdieusian approach can become "a powerful tool to enhance social emancipation … [as] Bourdieu's theory is essentially a political intervention, a form of political practice expressed as a social science" (Navarro, 2006, p. 16). By functioning as a space of critical reflexivity, imagination, and eventual manifestation via material culture and production practices, the field of cultural production and its artistic works function as a space of emergence; one that provides a means to test and explore developing imagined communities, their potential structures, and impact. In her discussion of the imaginative affordances of literature, Schwab eloquently articulates this when she concludes that, "it is by giving thought a material condition that writing facilitates the emergence of something new, including new systems of meaning… and new forms of life" (Schwab, 2012, p. 3). It is in this light, as a potential space of emergence, that I hope to examine and explore the ideas, publications and practices of Klaxon Press Collective.

Methodology

While art may have the power to "materialise ideas as yet unthought and, through these means, enable us to conceive the world differently" (Meskimmon, 2010, p. 92) it is profoundly difficult to measure the yet-to-be-realized. As such, this particular research focus demanded that I find a method that enabled the measurement, or at least the observation of the inchoate. In his own attempts to explore that relation of the arts and the

imaginary, most importantly, "This idea that art has a role in both forging a specific knowledge of the world and initiating new modes of being in the world" (2012, p. 11), Papastergiadis responds to the challenges this presents to traditional methods or inquiry by adopting an interdisciplinary methodology that "combines a close reading of visual images, participant observation in transnational projects, and contextual theoretical commentary (2012, p. 11). It was for these reasons -- most importantly a desire to privilege the work and words of KPC – that this project took the form of a multi-methodological case study informed by ethnographic methods, emphasizing a descriptive qualitative approach, in order to facilitate a greater degree of self-representation and poly-vocality.

That being said, such an approach is not without limitations. Due to financial travel constraints, traditional ethnographic methods, most importantly being physically present or embedded in the field of study, were not feasible. As such, the primary field of inquiry and observation for this project was centered on Klaxon's digital presence (i.e. their website and digital publications). Examination of this digital field, or "observation" of it, therefore entailed an adjustment of observation methods, transforming them into document analysis, (including literary, textual, and visual analysis of KPC's published works and web content) and an attempted analysis of organization structure, practices, identity and aims (drawn primarily from available website and blog content). As I, the researcher, had a previously established relationship with the community and the organization, this research also made use of previously collected field notes, "on the ground" observations for the purposes of contextualization, and prior personal correspondence with the Collective. Initially, I had hoped to include individual interviews with core members of

KPC in order to glean an understanding of their project in their own words and from their own perspective. However, due to time constraints and KPC's busy schedule (which is presently dedicated to composing volume two of their self-produced journal), this was not feasible, and would be a worthwhile amelioration to this study if more time and resources were to become available. Yet another limitation of this project was my lack of fluency in the Bulgarian language. Though this is largely overcome by the fact that KPC's digital presence and its publications are bi-lingual (English/Bulgarian) this is, nonetheless a frustrating limitation, that, should more research be conducted, would ideally be corrected. In the meantime however, I am eternally grateful to, Monica Georgieff, Creative Director of Klaxon Press, who offered to translate all Bulgarian documents that were not already available in English. Finally, while one could argue that the narrow scope of this research (an individual case study of a small organization that is not alone in this field, nor the most well established in the region) is a limitation, I would in turn point out that KPC is both a timely example, and more importantly, a feasible way to examine the arts and the imaginary in Sofia, that could inform, and perhaps serve as a valuable foundation for future research in this area.

Analysis

This, finally, brings me to introduce the analysis that follows, which is structured into three chapters. While, each chapter will include a more specific and detailed literature review as it pertains to the particular analysis being conducted, you will, undoubtedly note that in many respects, the ideas and content of this analysis are highly interconnected, and perhaps at times, may seem potentially repetitious. However, this is due to the fact that

many of the elements discussed and studied in this analysis are simultaneous, continuous, and irreducible. Like Stephen Duncombe observes in his work on zines, the grounded analysis of material culture and community poses a challenge to researchers who must, in presenting their data, figure out "how to discipline undisciplined subjects" (2008, p. 20). In the work that follows, I have done this to the best of my ability in three chapters, each of which is delineated by primary focus. The first aims to serve as a contextualization of the efforts of Klaxon Press Collective, in a manner guided by the organization's own observations and self-contextualization. The second focuses on the traits of the KPC metamodern imaginary or imagined community with an emphasis on thematic literary and visual analysis of the premiere publication produced by KPC. Finally, the third chapter will extend and conclude the analysis with an exploration of the ways in which this metamodern imagined community is manifested, enacted, and potentially embodied in organizational practices and processes, as illustrated in the documentary content of KPC's website and blog. This study is exploratory, and therefore it could very well pose more questions than it answers, but the hope and overall goal remains that the questions it may pose are at the very least, increasingly positioned, informed, and grounded both contextually and culturally than those with which it started.

Chapter 1: Contextualizing Klaxon Press Collective

Heavily theoretical and artistically focused, Klaxon does not explicitly position itself in relation to mass media or political actors. Thus, in order to successfully contextualize the potentially implied politics of the collective's position, identity, and rhetoric it was necessary to engage in broader research regarding Bulgarian history, politics, culture and media, as it is equally important to grasp the subtleties of these implied connections, and the precedent for the manner in which interconnectivity is, (or perhaps more importantly, is not) addressed, in order to grasp not only KPCs perceived context, but the role of the arts and arts media within it. As such, this analysis is driven by relevant thematic threads drawn from Klaxon Press's self-contextualization, both in interviews and as articulated within their blog content and the chapter will provide a historical and contemporary context for Klaxon Press, with an emphasis on these self-identified key themes or topics. Here I hope to position KPC's actions and its "imagination" of the future, as well as clarify or delineate the role and potential of the arts as a comparatively fruitful and legitimized discursive or reflexive space within contemporary Bulgarian culture. First, I will briefly address Bulgarian history prior to communism but will primarily emphasize the artpolitical nature of the Communist Era, the socio-cultural responses to it, and impact of the post-communist transition in relation to media, art and the politics of the imaginary.

THE BULGARIAN HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

To begin, I would like to present a brief history of the Bulgarian people and state as it pertains to and influences the current circumstances, and more importantly, the

contemporary national and cultural historical narrative. KPC briefly mentions this narrative in their self-contextualization as a sort of call to action. They ask readers to,

> Recall the period in the final years of and after the fall of Ottoman rule often referred to as the Bulgarian Renaissance. Its leaders were educated abroad and possessed an intrinsically important global perspective. Each one returned to the country to established high educational institutions, promote liberal ways of though and develop the arts thereby reviving what had been a debilitated society with a highly circumspect slave mentality. It was a mass revival ("Post-postmodernism", 2012).

This reference serves as a powerful allegory for the current goals of Klaxon Press Collective, and the narrative itself points to a few key ideas and trends within Bulgarian history that have been and continue to have influence both socially and politically. This narrative generally begins with the Bulgarian Kingdom established in the seventh century, which existed for four centuries. This was followed by a long period, 1393-1878 to be precise, of control by neighboring powers – the Byzantines and the Ottoman Empire sequentially (Kelleher, 2009, p. 41). During my time in Sofia, this period was often referred to as the era of "the Turkish Yoke" (Kelleher, 2009, p. 41). Some Bulgarians sought to shake this "yoke" in the mid-19th century, and attempted a series of unsuccessful revolts against the Ottomans, which have since been enshrined as a crucial moment in Bulgarian history (Kelleher, 2009, p. 41).

The Bulgarian Revival has become a highly evocative historical touchstone, and thus, over the decades has been appropriated and utilized by ruling powers to justify their authority and gain Bulgarian subservience, endorsement, or support. In his historiography of this period, Roumen Daskalov points out that despite a good deal of documentary evidence and personal accounts of the period, these are often discarded as, in their relative

polyphony and discussion of the instability of the period, do not support "the grand ('high') historical narrative of the nation, which is unitary, coherent, teleological, and emotionally tense" (2004, p. 3). The powerfully mythic nature of the revival makes it a highly symbolic political touchstone in Bulgarian culture. Thus, appealing to the tradition of the revival has often been used towards political ends, in attempts to naturalize or "nationalize" change within the region; an approach historically adopted by the communist party, which presented itself as continuing the revival's revolutionary tradition, as well as a range of present day political parties (Daskalov, 2004). As previously indicated, Klaxon Press Collective is no exception to this pattern, as they too adopt the rhetoric of the "revival" ("Post-postmodernism", 2012) within their presentation of their context and general goals, stating that if promising trends in emigration continue to hold, " we may be in for a second coming of Bulgaria's National Revival"("Post-postmodernism", 2012). Such a "second coming" continues the narrative of independence, which was cut short due to the failure of the revival itself.

In the end, Bulgarian independence was only achieved later, when "Russian forces pushed the Ottomans out of the Balkans" in the Russo-Turkish war and in doing so earned a positive reputation within Bulgaria (Kelleher, 2009, p. 41). Though its reality did not live up to the hopes of the "Bulgarian Revival" the end of Ottoman rule in 1878 had long term and immediate impact upon Bulgarian society. In their history of the Balkans, Bideleux and Jeffries cite this moment as a crucial juncture at which the conceptualization of the modern nation state became tied to the idea of ethnic collectivism, as it was the 1878 Berlin Congress, which "ratified the creation of several newly independent state on an

'ethnic' basis in the Balkans in 1878." This was later reinforced when American "President Woodrow Wilson formally proclaimed in January 1918 that the doctrine of 'national self-determination' would be the guiding principle of the post-1918 peace settlements" (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998, p. 407-17). According to their analysis, the long term consequences of these factors

> has been to make ethnic collectivism, ethnic discrimination and the preferential status of numerically dominant ethnic groups the very basis of the state, of democratic representation, of public employment and of many (perhaps most) social, political, and economic rights and entitlements in the so-called 'successor states' of the Balkans and East Central Europe. (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998, p. 407-17)

Such an understanding recognizes the role of historical factors i.e. the "ethnocratic" foundations of the post-Ottoman era, in shaping the trajectory of national communities and modernization in a manner that differed from Western Europe (Bideleux, 2001, p. 25-32) – reasserting that the contrast between these spaces is rooted in historical circumstance rather than a congenital cultural failing.

In the more immediate aftermath of their 1878 "liberation" by their fellow Slavs, Bulgaria went on to be a subject of great debate amongst the current Western powers within Europe, who eventually decided to split the state into two territories. This in turn led to a strong desire for unification, which was realized in 1885. Three decades later, Bulgaria went on to side with the Central Powers in the First World War, and once again lost a great deal of territory and experienced a period of political instability until power was consolidated under Tsar Boris III. It was under his leadership that Bulgaria became involved in WWII. Though Bulgaria initially attempted to remain neutral, economic

dependence on Germany led to Bulgaria siding with the Axis Powers. However, in 1944, the USSR declared war on Bulgaria, after which the Bulgarian Army conspired with the local "communist-led Fatherland Front in order to avoid violence. On September 9, 1944, the Fatherland Front took over the government with the acquiescence of the former regime" (Kelleher, 2009, p. 43). Thus, though technically independent, Bulgaria began what would be yet another period of heavy subservience to a new powerful neighbor, the USSR.

THE COMMUNIST ERA

> *Bulgaria, however, cannot necessarily stand as an exemplar of either communist or post-communist Europe. The East Bloc was not monolithic, with each nation's history and culture influencing its experience of communism. Bulgaria's communist period included distinctions that influenced the nation's attitude towards communism…* (Kelleher, 2009, p. 40)

According to Michael Kelleher, the "establishment of communism in Bulgaria occurred in a manner similar to that in the other countries occupied by the Soviets after the Second World War: local communists, backed by the Red Army, went about eliminating other political parties and any possible opponents until they fully consolidated power" (2009, p. 43) These powerful locals included previously exiled Georgie Dimitrov, who would become the 1st prime minister. Despite this similarity, Bulgaria's transformation and its results had some distinctive characteristics. During the communist period, Bulgaria gained a reputation as the Soviet's closest ally in Europe, thanks to the diplomatic efforts of Party Chairman Todor Zhikov – who maintained a consistent influence in the nation's politics as Europe's longest serving communist leader (1954-1989) (Kelleher, 2009, p. 44; Bideleux & Jeffries, 2006, p. 88). Similarly, though industrialization was a prevalent element of the communist program within Eastern Europe, Bulgaria saw one of the most

rapid and extreme changes from a rural to urban and industrialized society. This process brought with it "increased living standards and the availability of certain consumer products to Bulgarians, a factor that observers credit with leading many Bulgarians to overlook their lack of freedom and contributing to the absence of dissent in communist Bulgaria compared to other East Bloc countries" (Kelleher, 2009, p. 44).Though Bulgarians may have been more amenable to the process, one should not take this as an indication of a relatively benign impact of the Communist regime on Bulgarian culture. To the contrary, the Communist period and its efforts towards "modernization" had severe implications for Bulgarian culture and the arts, and it is this history that has set the stage for KPC's efforts and shaped the way in which the arts and aesthetics are understood and constituted in relation to other economic, political, and social processes within Bulgaria.

WRESTLING WITH MODERNITY

In particular, the subject of modernity, and its achievement (or lack thereof) in Bulgaria, hangs heavy over Klaxon Press's self-contextualization. Historically, Bulgaria has been subjected to a variety of conceptualizations of modernity, the majority of which have been transposed from other nations and traditions onto the Bulgarian community. However, despite consistent rhetoric of modernization within the Communist and post-communist period, Klaxon Press Collective argues that, on a fundamental level modernity has yet to be fully achieved in Bulgaria, despite multiple attempts at such development. KPC points out that the fact that modernity never quite "took" in Bulgaria can be attributed to a number of reasons, including the state's history of long periods of political subjugation with limited self-determination and furthermore the understanding and approach to

modernity during the Communist Era. In assessing KPC's contemporary "modern" predicament, I found the work of Anthony Giddens and Richard Kearney proved exceptionally helpful in unravelling the elements of modernity and its impact within Bulgaria and upon Klaxon Press. Though not tightly abided by in this research, the frameworks provided by these theorists both help to provide insight into Klaxon's articulation of the Bulgarian "condition" and their suggested form of treatment. More specifically, though their conceptualizations of the contemporary "modern" or 'postmodern" condition differs, Giddens' understanding of the realities of what he dubs "high modernity" and its impact on identity, proves illuminating in conjunction with Kearney's illustration of the role and relationship between the Modern and the imaginary, both social and narrative.

Giddens loosely defines modernity as "the modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence" (Giddens, 1990, p. 1) and Klaxon similarly recognizes modernity (and later, postmodernity) as a Western construct. Akin to Giddens understanding of the modern and his theory of structuration, KPC also points out the necessary connection between the development of modernity and the structure of Western societies and culture, saying that "The only reason modernism in art and philosophy could exist was because of the structure of Western society - so, it's no wonder the phenomenon is attributed almost exclusively to that part of the world" ("Post-postmodernism", 2012). Though Western in origin, KPC argues that questions of

modernity are equally relevant to the East, due to the historical dominance of the West in the region. Thus, while

> Most will argue that terms like modern and postmodern exclusively describe the West's developments in thought throughout history. But if the West has ever had a consistent role historically, it has been that of a determinant of policy for the East. The West has, more often than not, marked the major cultural, political and economical lulls and blooms of the modern age for an entire world. The West has been at the forefront of major global decisions anywhere from deciding borders of other countries to which kasha the Russians should be eating. ("Post-postmodernism", 2012)

Despite its lack of local origin, according to KPC, modernity seems to have become a primary aspiration within Bulgarian society. This is particularly evidenced by the importance and prevalence of the narrative regarding the Bulgarian Revival of the 19th century, which generally describes a valiant attempt by Bulgarian renegades to realize one of the ultimate modern projects – the nation state (Anderson, 1982; Lerner, 1958; Shah, 2011). Though Bulgaria was eventually granted a degree of national autonomy during the decades between their "liberation" from the Ottomans, and eventual vassalage to the USSR, the dramatic realization of the narrative of national revival remained elusive.

Rather than evolving in a participatory fashion out of a national revival, the processes of modernization within Bulgaria developed during the Communist period and were highly influenced by the Soviet perspective. KPC distinguishes this from their notion of "True" modernism which encouraged a comparatively increased degree of personal choice and reflexivity ("Post-postmodernism", 2012) arguing that "Communis[m]'s form of modernism was in many ways an incubated construct of fear-mongering and limitation. True modernism was socially constructed outside of the USSR's control and didn't hit it

until much later" ("Post-postmodernism", 2012). Certainly, the lack of a strong capitalist economic approach differentiated modernity, as established under the Communist regime, however, modernization during this period still fit, to some extent, with the characteristics that Giddens believes distinguish modernity from previous social eras and structures. These include a dramatic increase in the scope and swiftness of change, which has increased interconnection across the globe (Giddens, 1990, p. 6), as well as a modern shift in "the intrinsic nature of modern institutions [which are] simply not found in prior historical periods" (1990, p. 6). Such institutions include the nation-state and the city, "orders" that under modernism are conceived of differently than in preceding eras, and, in particular, are highly dependent upon reflexivity, a quality that Giddens defines as more than "self-consciousness," rather, it is "the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life" which is "grounded in the continuous monitoring of action which human beings display and expect others to display" (Giddens, 1984, p. 3).

Though by no means idyllically modern, for Bulgaria, the 20th century did bring dramatic changes, including increased economic dependency on foreign powers (in particular, Germany, followed by Soviet Russia) and the swift industrialization and urbanization of a formerly agricultural and largely rural state (Kelleher, 2009; Dimou, 2009). However, rather than developing the reflexivity that Giddens argues is so crucial to modern institutions and identity, communism provided strictly enforced unifying ideological principles and defined identities that limited the potential for reflexive political and personal endeavors. KPC asks their readers to

> Imagine yourself on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain during Soviet rule where Sofia sits in the skirts of the Vitosha Mountain struck dumb by modernism, calling it sacrilege and trapped under the boot heels of the leaders of the bloc. How could modern thought take root here and propel the nation into the modern age? Shh! Don't try and answer that or Big Brother will punish you. ("Post-postmodernism", 2012)

Reflexivity and personal self-interrogation were not merely frowned upon, they were endangering. As an art collective, it's not surprising that Klaxon Press articulated modernism in relation to its artistic and aesthetic components, linking them with modern democratic political practice: "Arguably, modernism and the modern era came to the West in the late 19th century in the form of Kafka and Joyce in literature and prior to that in the form of democracy in politics" ("Post-postmodernism", 2012). As the following sections on communist aesthetics and Bulgarian literature will show, art, and literature in particular, did not reflect the reflexive tendencies of modernist writers in the west, who are often distinguished by the manner in which they take the "self" as their object (Muller, 2010). Rather, the reflexive exploration of the self within Bulgarian cultural production was restricted in favor of strictly regulated socialist realism.

ARTPOLITICS & THE COMMUNIST ERA

In his 2010 work, *Political Aesthetics*, Crispin Sartwell argues that "Political systems are no more centrally textual than they are centrally systems of imagery, architecture, music, styles of embodiment and movement, clothing and fibers, furnishings, and graphic arts" (p. 2). Within such a system, aesthetics is not only a tool for the gaining of power, but for the constitution or manifestation of that power. Though Sartwell utilizes the political regime of the Nazis as an example, his words, in many respects ring equally

true for the Reich's ideological nemesis – Soviet Communism. During Bulgaria's communist period, the arts, and more generally, cultural production, were reorganized as a powerful and valuable tool for the manifestation and preservation of Communist power. This movement was made explicit in the artistic ideology of Socialist Realism, which was encouraged (or demanded) throughout the USSR. The sheer breadth of Socialist Realism and the concept's implications makes it, in some ways a challenge to define. Far more than an artistic style, or movement, a more accurate and "encompassing explanation of Socialist Realism is that all forms of art and design have a role within communist society and should be used to 'educate and inspire' the proletariat" (Kelleher, 2009, p. 63).

Bulgaria, as a close ally of the Soviets, was no exception to the application of this rule. While aesthetics, as a field had previously been informed by a number of heterogeneous viewpoints gathered by travelling Bulgarian scholars from France, Germany, and Russia, during the communist period, Bulgarian art, aesthetic philosophy, and design was rigorously subjected to strict criteria developed by local Marxist intellectuals (Spassova, 2001, p. 113). According to Pravda Spassova, Marxist thought was first applied to aesthetics within Bulgaria by Dimitar Blagoev, who clearly articulated a specific definition of the role of art and the artists within Bulgarian society (2001, p. 113). In the literary journal *Novo Vreme,* Blagoev maintained the following:

> 1. An artist does not create on impulse; in order to be significant, he instead needs a broad, progressive Weltanschauung.
> 2. Art does not rest on conscious illusion; instead it is a specific but true reflection of reality. Great art grasps the most characteristic features of life, it portrays "certain common conditions".
> 3. There is not great art without tendentiousness.

> 4. A work of art is not for aesthetic pleasure, it serves to promote a society's greater self-understanding.
> 5. Pure art is nonsense; by its very nature art is class and party oriented." (Spassova, 2001, p. 113-114; D. Blagoev, 1951)

Similar views were held by Todor Pavlov, Bulgaria's most prolific Marxist philosopher during that period (Spassova, 2001, p. 115). Pavlov held the view that,

> 1) First of all, art is an aesthetic reality, that is to say, an artistic image, which embodies certain human ideas; 2) Second, the artistic image has to be 'ideologically meaningful,' otherwise it turns into an ordinary object; and, 3) The third characteristic of the artistic image is artistic proportions, which is linked with aesthetic reality and the meaning of art" (Spassova, 2001, p. 115-116; Pavlov, 1937).

In line with this, he furthermore rejected the view that art could be apolitical or amoral – linking aesthetics with ethics (Spassova, 2001, p. 116; Pavlov, 1937) and rejecting the idea of art for art's sake. Pavlov's belief in ideological purposefulness of art was brought to bear on Bulgarian cultural production of the period by Pavlov himself, as he "was particularly active in maintaining control over the actual production of art-works in particular spheres, criticizing, and even censoring those books, plays, exhibitions that failed to 'reflect truthfully socialist reality" (Spassova, 2001, p. 116; Pavlov, 1937).

This "truthful socialist reality" became literally embodied in a new Communist landscape (imbued with a distinct Soviet influenced aesthetic) that was established within Sofia, as well as in the expectations of self-presentation for its inhabitants. Following the Soviet example, Bulgaria constructed their own (albeit smaller) version of Moscow's Red Square, and even built a public mausoleum for the storage and presentation of the body of the state's first communist leader, Dimitrov (Kelleher, 2009, p. 50). The new "order meant not only a new political system but also a new political style" (Aman, 1987, p. 88; Holleran,

2014). Thus, monuments (including the "Russian Monument" referenced in the personal introduction – also known as the Monument to the Soviet Army and Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship) were erected across town as a constant reminder of the "socialist reality." Rules of personal dress and presentation were also impacted. By the late communist period, long hair or beards on men were often interpreted as "displays of nonconformity" which would make one vulnerable to charges of "parasitism" and arrest (Ganev, 2014b, p. 521). All in all, aesthetics was by no means the superficial image associated with the Communist regime, but a key element of that regime's manifestation, iteration, and hold on power.

TRADITIONS OF RESISTANCE, AESTHETICS, & BULGARIAN INTELLIGENTSIA

While aesthetics proved a fruitful means through which to imagine the socialist project and manifest its realities, it also maintained a certain elusiveness, allowing for the eventual contestation of power by those it was meant to control. All of the power that had been invested in the artistic and aesthetic realm made it a fertile ground for resistance and a powerful and perhaps more importantly, accessible means for the articulation of alternative identities and the formation of alternative publics and systems.

In her study of Bulgarian cultural resistance during the Communist Era, Albena Lutzkanova-Vassileva notes the difficulties present in making any observation about "unofficial" Bulgarian culture, due to the fact that such culture lacks an archive and is inherently evasive and sub textual in nature. What is clear is that, compared to other communist nations, "Bulgarian samizdat had a rather brief and uneventful history. It appeared for a very short period of time… and was realized in only two new literary journals, *Glas* (Voice) and *Most* (Bridge), which were published in just three issues each"

in 1989, just prior to the end of the Communist Era (Lutzkanova-Vassileva, 2009, p. 134). These literary journals were produced by the Bulgarian intelligentsia, affiliated with the University of Sofia, "and were distributed free of charge" (Lutzkanova-Vassileva, 2009, p. 134). Lutzkanova argues that this lack is partially due to the fact that such material productions were more easily subjected to censorship and their authors to punitive action by the State, thus developing a preference for more slippery, elusive forms of resistance (2009, p. 140).

This does not mean that material production of unsanctioned "alternative" goods was nonexistent. For example, as shown by Ganev in his 2014 study, Western (and primarily British) rock and roll mixtapes were a hot commodity on the Bulgarian black market during the late communist period. Perhaps more importantly, these mixtapes, and the conversations that lead to their creation and dissemination served to establish a unique alternative public with its own alternative practices and politics. According to Ganev, the borsa was "a site where mechanically reproduced works of art were creatively deployed in pursuit of authentic personhood and aesthetic ambitions – the scene of enchanting encounters between technology and culture" (2014b, p. 523). Through educational conversation about British Rock and Roll and the development of individualized specialty mixtapes – each dictated by the preferences of the buyer, the products of the borsa became more than "indistinguishable bricks in the service of the egalitarian masonry of cultural sameness; they were embraced as brick-a-brac with which every buyer could create his own unique self" (Ganev, 2014b, p. 523). These material manifestations of individual preference and identity were accompanied by a set of alternative economic and social

practices that were oppositional to the majority of black market transactions within Bulgaria. In particular, business at the borsa "was conducted in accordance with informal rules intended to diminish, rather than amplify, the obvious asymmetry of power inherent in black market transactions involving entrepreneurs and clients…buyers of music were reportedly never cheated by the entrepreneurs" (Ganev, 2014b, p. 522).

Curiously, though the borsa was an "alternative public" constituted "by the politics of resistance – by the deliberate and resilient pursuit of heterodox alternatives construed as a long-term project" (Ganev, 2014b, p. 532), it was rarely explicitly articulated as such. The community formed there was more likely to run from the "kuka" ("hooks" or police whose job it was to catch individuals who were derisive of the Communist regime), thus ensuring the chance to meet another day, rather than directly challenging the regime. In many respects, persistence was the means of resistance. Direct engagement with the system was not the goal and, considering the context of Sofia at the time, by no means made what the music lovers of the borsa did any less political. Ganev argues that in Late Socialist Bulgaria, "the quest for ideological alternatives was oriented toward various musical genres" and that while this "quest was not necessarily motivated by anticommunist militancy… it clearly had political ramifications" (2014b, p. 535). These political ramifications were derived from nature of the musical sounds themselves, which Ganev identifies as in alignment with a Bulgarian musical tradition of multiplicity and cacophony (2014b, p. 535). By utilizing the borsa for the purposes of this cacophonous exchange, the borsa community supported the "fracturing of the regime's monopolitics control over public spaces" (2014b, p. 536) and aided in the coalescing of the developing alternative

cultural and political codes, which evolved into a defined and identifiable subcultural politics. Specifically it "reflects a simple truth about what listening to Led Zeppelin actually meant in Eastern Europe in the 1980s: it meant that you did not like Lenin" (2014b, p. 537).

Theoretical Discursive Resistance

This indirect approach towards resisting the aesthetic institutions of the communist regime was also present within philosophical circles in Bulgaria. For the aforementioned reasons, there was a marked tendency towards subversive lecture and discourse rather than print, if only because this kind of theoretical discursive resistance "skillfully evaded the censorship of the regime" as "the state was not conversant with the genre of inflammation and had no mechanism for controlling it" (Lutzkanova-Vassileva, 2009, p. 143). Lutzkanova dubs this the "theoretical turn" in Bulgarian resistance. This theoretical discursive resistance was constituted in two different groups or networks of intellectual discussion that were known respectively as Seminar and Synthesis, and, "while it would be an overstatement to claim that samizdat, the Seminar, or Synthesis brought down the totalitarian system in Bulgaria, it seems unquestionable that the resistance that they offered became instrumental in communism's breakdown there" (Lutzkanova-Vassileva, 2009, p. 135).

The theoretical approach of these groups was not only pragmatic (in avoiding censorship), but also deeply rooted in an artpolitical understanding of their society. Echoing Todorov (1995), there was an understanding that under communism, institutions such as "Factories are not built to produce commodities…. They are allegorical figures of

industrialization… They result in a deficit of goods, but an overproduction of symbolic meanings. Their essence is aesthetic, not economic" Todorov (1995a, p. 65). As such, Bulgarian intellectual collectives like Synthesis and Seminar decided that, in order to "battle the system of total discursive control and power, to abolish the self-regenerating semiosphere of communism, one should use theory and not political action" (Lutzkanova-Vassileva, 2009, p. 142).

Furthermore, such an approach, as mentioned before, exhibits a lack of direct engagement with the regime in power. In accordance with their disenchantment with the political system, Bulgarian intellectuals within these groups also expressed a distaste for denunciative political discourse as a means to effectively counter the regime. According to Lutzkanova-Vassileva, this was because "the members of Bulgarian unofficial culture did not think there was any truth or norm they could base their criticism on, since every criticism of totalitarianism had already been inscribed in the totalitarian order itself" (2009, p. 136). This understanding of the ineffectual nature of political engagement can be seen within a form of resistance that, while political, did not appear to be political in nature: In a series of interviews conducted with former members of these groups, one individual states, "One of the most bizarre examples I can recall, was a seminar on mathematical logic that took place in 1988 in the largest auditorium of Sofia University, with five hundred people listening carefully to the most obscure subject matter"(Lutzkanova-Vassileva, 2009, p. 139). The ultimate goal and appeal of such highly theoretical discourse was that it did "not seek to criticize the Communist system, but instead, to interfere aggressively with the language of power… so that [its] unnaturalness is exposed" (Lutzkanova-Vassileva,

2009, p. 143). In a more grounded sense, events like the mathematics lecture provided valuable opportunities for their attendees to engage in the "in the pleasure of speaking a language different from the state – even when this was an innocuous scientific language and not the forbidden words that the regime would censor and punish" (Lutzkanova-Vassileva, 2009, p. 140; Nikolchina, 2002).

For the well-networked and educated Bulgarian, the arts provided a comparatively affordable and sustainable means of resistance and alterity. While texts could be censored, the ephemeral and highly theoretical dialogues of Seminar and Synthesis provided a safe haven for alternative thought and conversation. Similarly, spaces such as the borsa and its mixtapes allowed for conversation regarding artistic and aesthetic preferences not condoned by the regime (and therefore by default, political) – affording group members the opportunity for individual identity development and more broadly, the development of an alternative community and its associated practices. While the communist regime was investing great effort in controlling the utterances and aesthetic preferences of its populous with the goal of enforcing its own understanding of socialist realism, it simultaneously acknowledged and invested aesthetics, art and culture with a degree of power. In turn, the use of this by communities like that of the borsa for the formation of "authentic selves" and the formation of trustworthy exchanges and practices also lends the arts sense of legitimacy, constructing the field as a space that while not untainted by the powers that be, is largely salvageable for the purposes of individual expression and egalitarian engagement.

POST-COMMUNIST BULGARIA & "THE TRANSITION"

> *Bulgarians refer to the end of communism as Promenite or 'The Changes'. This refers not only to the end of a repressive regime's control of government, the economy, and nearly all aspects of society, but also the slow, at times difficult emergence of democracy and a free market economy (Kelleher, 2009, p45).*
> *Fast-forward a couple of decades. 1989, a concrete wall is demolished, an iron curtain unhinged and modernism is free to flow into the east. Along with it comes democracy, modernist art, the Western presence and the demand for an economy which can actually compete globally – all better late than never, but several decades too inexperienced…* ("Post-postmodernism", 2012)

As KPC notes above, the Post-Communist Era brought with it many changes, frustrations, and disappointments. In their Post-communist history, Bideleux and Jeffries describe the challenges of transforming vertically integrated Communist infrastructure into a responsive functioning, and more horizontally integrated set of reflexive institutions. While Bulgaria has made great strides in transforming its institutions over the past few decades, this change has been slow and extremely belabored. In particular, the 1990s proved especially challenging and disheartening – with the political frustrations of the Bulgarian people culminating in serious protest in 1997. Their frustration was valid and echoed by former Bulgarian president Zheliu Zhelev in his 1997 farewell address, when he stated that "The Bulgarian model of transition failed because, for seven years, no economic and social reforms were conducted in the country" (Bell, 1998a, p. 1). This failure is attributable to a number of reasons, but corruption stands out among these as a primary issue.

During the first decade of Promenite, real political, social, and economic improvement was undermined by political opportunists (many of which were formerly nomenklatura, i.e. formerly well connected or high ranking within the Communist regime)

and transformed into superficial ideological debates which merely masked extreme economic and political corruption. As Bulgarian historiographer Roumen Daskalov notes, the Post-Communist Era was characterized by the "so called polarization of politics", but this polarization never prevented leaders of opposing political parties from finding "a number of common interests, especially those related to their salaries, perquisites, and work as lobbyists for shadowy economic groups (1998, p. 11). In fact,

> An exception to the gridlock on so many issues, was the unanimity of MPs of all parties on increasing their salaries, securing the perquisites of automobiles, luxurious holidays, and subsidized food and entertainment for themselves. Parliamentary immunity also allowed the National Assembly to serve as a hideout for some who would otherwise have faced criminal charges. (1998, p. 23)

Loopholes were intentionally left in Bulgarian laws so that savvy corrupt businessmen could take advantage of the burgeoning democracy; instituting an economic system in which debt was nationalized, and profit was privatized – a debilitating combination for the already hard pressed nation (Bideleux & Jeffries, 2006, p. 102).

The corruption was no secret to the Bulgarian populous, as their association with the former regime made many of these profiteers exceptionally visible. Daskalov makes a point to distinguish the nature of these economic elites from those that dominate Western economies, stating that

> While economic elites also dominate developed democracies, the problem in Bulgaria lies in their outlook and practices. They act as plunderers of state resources, agents in the laundering of money, "credit millionaires" who destroyed the banking system by taking loans with no intention of repaying them, heads of phony firms… who take the savings of the population and vanish into thin air, bosses of the criminal underworld, trafficking in drugs, arms, and prostitutions, extortionists, profiteers from illegal or semi-legal deals…Ex-wrestlers, once the pride of the communist regime, became the cutting edge of criminal "Business" and

> have established its style: thick necks, track suits (more recently changed to designer suits) and ”hard” manners.” (1998, p. 27)

Ex-wrestlers and mafia members continue to be visible in Bulgarian society and retain a hold that, while perhaps diminished to some extent by reform (Vigenin, 2006; Vassilev, 2006) remains strong. The stranglehold that suspicious financial groups held on Bulgaria's economy made all institutions untrustworthy, including the banks. According to Daskalov, "The banking system became a tool to rob the people of their savings, a process which reached its peak under Zhan Videnov's government, bringing about the system's collapse and leading the press, not without reason, to describe Bulgaria as a *kleptocracy*" (1998, p. 25). It can come as no surprise that managing corruption was one of the primary criteria for admission to the EU, which Bulgaria, met in 2007 (Schipke, 2006). However, such problems are far from eradicated, as debate still erupts over the often suspicious allocations of EU development funds to particular Bulgarian companies (Sofia Globe, Payner, 2013).

MOVING BEYOND "MENTALITY"

> *Quickly, Bulgarians realize the governing politic of culture, economy and philosophy of this modern age aren't what they're cracked up to be. No longer sheltered by their curtains and blocs, Bulgaria is now exposed to global fluctuations without ever getting the chance to cultivate a modern way of thought and facilitate national prosperity within the new circumstance.*
>
> ("Post-postmodernism", 2012)

Though Bideleux and Jefferies take pains to point out the impressive task that Bulgaria is taking on in attempting reform, many have implicated the Bulgarian people in the failures encountered during "the transition." All too often this critique has taken the form of derisive treatment of the supposed "Bulgarian mentality" – an approach that, like

Bideleux and Jefferies, I argue is reductive (2006, p. 2). Such an analysis is, in many respects a lack thereof and I concur that we must look to the structural and institutional factors that create these problems. However, as Giddens (1984, 1991) and Bourdieu (1979/1984), and many scholars of Bulgarian politics would indicate, identity is inevitably caught up within structuring of society (1991, p. 12). Thus, a more thorough analysis requires us to explore both spheres – acknowledging their interrelation and interdependence. Such an approach is necessitated by the fact that the notion of the relationship Bulgarian society has to the challenges of Promenite is addressed within Bulgarian scholarship, as well as by KPC. Mitev, in his work on Bulgarian popular politics, argues that

> During the transition, these different attitudes toward the state reached their ultimate extremes. The attitude of alienation toward the state created a psychological atmosphere conducive to the plundering of state institutions and massive violations of the law. No other East European country saw so many symptoms of anarchy. In Bulgaria, the rejection of the totalitarian state turned into a rejection of all state authority. This cannot be explained as the result of any cold-blooded decision or conspiracy; its roots were in the basic outlook of the people. (1998, p.51)

This interrelation is similarly addressed by KPC in their mention of the phenomenon of "Bulgarians complaining" and the national adoption of a way of life "akin to a morphine-esque apathy" ("Post-postmodernism", 2012). KPC also articulates the connection between these factors, similarly arguing that the apathetic and ironic approach engendered by challenging infrastructure only serves to reify the problem.

Many have pointed to inconsistencies between the social pre-requisites for a successful democracy and the realities faced by Bulgarian society. In his historical review

of Bulgaria's propensity for democratic self-governance, John D. Bell returns back to Bulgaria's brief period of political independence prior to the arrival of communism – the years after their liberation from the Ottoman Empire. He points out that

> Democratic systems work best when a general consensus of values exists in the society and when political actors are willing to compromise and to preserve a basic civility when dealing with their opponents. None of these conditions had ever [been] obtained in Bulgaria. After its liberation from Ottoman rule, even though it possess the relatively liberal Turnovo Constitution, Bulgaria saw its political life degenerate. (Bell, 1998b, p. 3)

This is by no means the only instance of a link being established between popular dispositions and democratic preparation, as Mitev also points out that while

> in central Europe… mass demonstrations reached their high point before the transition actually began, in Bulgaria the street came into its own only after the changes had already begun. …In the first case, pressure from below was directed toward the creation of democratic institutions. In the second case, it cut off, blocked, or substituted itself for the new institutions. Irrespective of changes in cabinets and parliaments, the focus of public attention moved steadily away from questions of policy to questions of power. (1998, p. 41)

This sense of ill-preparedness is but one of many themes within Bulgarian literature and scholarship that seeks to explain the disappointments of Promenite. However, these dispositions should not be reductively treated as a congenital mentality. In contrast, from a Bourdieusian perspective these dispositions are inherently malleable and responsive, as illustrated by the highly cogent manner in which they have evolved in relation to Bulgarian politics.

Rampant corruption and the other associated challenges of Promenite have, indubitably, impacted the Bulgarian experience and, to use Bourdieu's terms, its durable

dispositions or habitus. Loic Wacquant offers an effective summary of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, stating that it is

> a mediating notion that revokes the common sense duality between the individual and the social by capturing 'the internalization of the external and the externalization of internality' [in the famous expression of Bourdieu], that is, the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways, which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu. (2005, p. 316)

Within Bulgaria, the evolution of habitus, i.e. the "internalization of the external" and vice versa is evident in "Two characteristic popular attitudes [that] have appeared during Bulgaria's relatively short history as an independent state. One looks on politics as a means of personal advancement and enrichment. The second takes the form of an aloof, skeptical, alienated attitude toward politics (Mitev, 1998, p. 39). These dispositions are so recognized as characteristic within Bulgarian society that they have even been immortalized within "Bulgarian literature … in two representative characters: Bai Ganiu, a symbolic of the unscrupulous political intriguer driven by greed and egoism, and Andreshko, the Bulgarian villager who leaves the state official in the lurch, all the while avoiding open conflict with him" (Mitev, 1998, p. 39). Though literary tradition and representation within Bulgaria will be addressed more thoroughly in Chapter Two, Klaxon Press Collective also recognizes the challenges posed by a Bulgarian habitus that is apathetic and alienated from politics and change. In a blog interview, Georgieff, KPC's founder and creative director, passionately argues that Klaxon Press is "klaxist" precisely because "it accepts people who

are willing to be engaged on many different levels, create new things and not be pinned down by labels. We only hate apathy. Apathy is the worst" (Boyanova, 2014).

Frustration, apathy, backwardness, and insecurity are all traits attributed to Bulgarian society – but these are not strictly, as Bideleux and Jefferies suggest, Western impositions. Though such assessments are often mistaken in this understanding of such traits as unalterable elements, they nonetheless, evoke sentiments and frustrations that *are* locally expressed. For example, Bulgarian scholar Petur-emil Mitev, who points out that extreme nationalism had never been an issue within Bulgaria, if only because "There is another element in the public mind that [is against it]: the inclination of Bulgarians toward national self-criticism. This characteristic seems to be unique to Bulgarians, or at least is in sharp contrast to our Balkan neighbors" (1998, p. 62). Within KPC's manifesto-esque blog post, Sofia is also perceived as being "in Europe's backwoods" – a locale that KPC hopes to escape ("Post-postmodernism", 2012). Similar themes of frustration with "backwardness" and even insecurity are also present in Ganev's earlier study of the borsa, where many respondents were dually motivated to educate themselves about rock and roll for the chance to express and manifest personal preference and identity. In general, the consumption of Western culture, and rock and roll in particular, within Eastern Europe during the communist period was driven by the sense of many Eastern Europeans that "they were nothing more than unsophisticated primitive forever destined to remain peripheral observers of a spectacle created by others and unfolding elsewhere" (Ganev, 2014b, p. 526) and thus, attempted to "catch up to" Western culture. Such dispositions, or in other

words, such a habitus is not a cultural flaw, but a reasonable response to the incredibly disappointing reality that Bulgarians faced at the end of the Communist Era.

Though Bulgaria has seen a great deal of promising improvement since the 1990s, including EU membership, KPC continues to point to the challenges to change created by the apathy of Bulgarian society. While one might perceive this as evidence that contradicts an assessment of such attitudes as exemplary of habitus (on the grounds that if habitus is responsive to the social environment, improvements in that environment should therefore reconstitute disposition accordingly) Wacquant provides a valuable argument to the contrary, stating that habitus is "endowed with built-in-inertia, insofar as habitus tends to produce practices patterned after the social structure that spawned them, and because each of its layers operates as a prism through which later experiences are filtered and subsequent strata of dispositions overlaid (the disproportionate weight of the schemata implanted in infancy)" (2005, p. 317). As such, it is perfectly feasible that a habitus might outlive its formative social environs, and, in doing so, retain a powerful (if no longer necessarily relevant) hold upon social practices, as practices themselves are

> the product of a dialectical relationship between a situation and a habitus, understood as a system of durable and transposable dispositions, which, integrating all past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions, and make it possible to accomplish infinitely differentiated tasks, thanks to the analogical transfer of schemata acquired in prior practice. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 106)

As Bourdieu's sociological theory would suggest, these disenchanted, distrusting dispositions or habitus, though responsive to the social structures of the Bulgarian environment, are also accompanied by practices which are identified by KPC and others.

When KPC points to the notion of "Bulgarians complaining" in their self-contextualization, though this may appear to be an opaque reference to cultural outsiders it is, in fact, a commentary on a culturally specific discursive practice ("Post-postmodernism", 2012). According to a 2012 ethnographic study of intergroup communication, "Bulgarians complaining" is identified as a phenomenon that reflects Bulgarian apathy towards politics and the potential for change in a post-Communist environment. The prominence of this phenomenon is affirmed by the fact that within the Bulgarian language, this practice has its very own term, "se oplakvate" meaning something along the lines of to complain, lament, or mourn. This practice draws upon the general "belief in a specific Bulgarian 'situation' (economic, political, and sociocultural) which is considered to be very bad and hopeless" (Giles, 2012, p49). The study concluded that the practice of "se oplakvate," "can be understood as an entitling cultural term which to Bulgarians refers to various communication events – the sharing of stories, the allocation of blame in a way that purges the individual of responsibility, and an overall negative evaluation of the Bulgarian 'situation'"(Giles, 2012, p. 49).

While some have criticized Bourdieu's approach to habitus and the reproduction of social structure as deterministic (Jenkins, 1992), the degree of reflexivity necessitated by his sociological endeavors also holds the power to subvert the powerful influences that it catalogues. Rejecting scientific positivism and the "objective" ideal, Bourdieu argues that "socioanalysis simultaneously requires … a systematic and rigorous self-critical practice of social science…the practice of genuine science requires a "reflexive turn" upon

itself"(Navarro, 2006, p. 15; Swartz, 1997, p. 10-11). Such a "reflexive sociology" not only aids in "uncovering sources of power and illuminating reasons that explain social asymmetries and hierarchies" but also "offers a good chance of producing knowledge about a given context and, as a result" can be effectively engaged to induce social transformation (Navarro, 2006, p. 16). By engaging Bourdieu and paying attention to the habitus and practices established within Bulgarian society, we can more definitively grasp the manner in which enabling, though understandable social practices and dispositions form and more effectively assist in their alteration. Bulgarian dispositions are not defective or fixed but are shaped through processes of socialization. Habitus, though inertial,

> is not a 'structure' but a durable set of dispositions that are formed, stored, recorded and exert influence that mold forms of human behavior... [that may] reinforce cohesion but also stimulates change and innovation, especially when it does not fit the surrounding social world where it evolves. But habitus is a necessary condition, not a sufficient one when social actions and practices are to be generated. Capital(s) is the second part of the equation orchestrated in the formula above. (Navarro, 2006, p. 16)

For true change to take place, it is necessary, as Bideleux and Jeffries argue, for institutions to change, but in turn, it will also require the adaptation of social dispositions, their concomitant practices within Bulgarian society, as well as the accumulation and application of capital. Ganev, in his 2014 work on the borsa's black market community, provides some insight into one way in which Bulgarian habitus, though problematic in many instances, may be able to function in a constructive and transformative manner.

Although he notes the prevalence of feelings of insecurity in comparison to Western culture within the borsa community, Ganev interprets this sense of cultural insecurity

critically, and argues for an alternative explanation that is rooted in the belief that "the very lack of satisfaction with what one 'is' and the desire to become something different, as well as the awareness that such becoming can only be realized through imaginative appropriations of culturally unmapped territories, indicates that the borsa fans were something more than imitators" (2014b, p. 526). Rather, they were more "cultural entrepreneurs" who engaged in an "individualistic project of self-creation and the collective effort to nurture bonds of sociability" (2014b, p. 526). Such an instance is an excellent example of what Bourdieu proponent Zander Navarro says when he notes that habitus is not merely a force of conservative cohesion, but can engender innovative practices (Navarro, 2006, p. 16).

2013: A TURNING POINT?

> *A Bulgarian nation waiting for Godot. Cue depression. Cue Skepticism. In other words, the infamously retarding apathy which Bulgarians have been associated with ever since the 90s. Furthermore, the irony with which they approach the structure of their society distances the individual from their government and vice versa. Newspapers have often called this the phenomenon of the 'Bulgarians complaining.'*
>
> ("Post-postmodernism", 2012)

Due to the challenges faced within the transition, as well as the flawed realities of Bulgarian politics, there has been widespread disenchantment in the value, legitimacy, and efficacy of the political process and its associated institutions. Within their blog post on "Post-postmodernism" (2012), Klaxon Press describes the cultural malaise of apathy as the backdrop for their endeavor to engage in worthwhile and positive discourse and debate as part of a "second national revival" and period of change within Bulgarian culture. However, less than a year after the post was written, the protests of 2013 illustrated a

distinct change in how Bulgarians enacted their political agency, which was in a manner that was far from the traditional "*se oplakvate*" approach.

Galvanized by skyrocketing utilities prices, protests began en mass in February 2013 and were spurred on by the unconscionable appointment of a markedly corrupt government in May of that same year. Venelin Ganev states that the general consensus regarding the eruption of the 2013 protests is that this was not a sudden realization of political agency and civic responsibility by the Bulgarian populous, but an explosion of frustration from a society who "thought that they had seen it all" (Ganev, 2014a, p. 36) only to find that things had suddenly become far worse that they had ever expected. Until that point, when faced with the corruption of the political (and media) apparatus, "the Bulgarian people reacted with a knowing smile. This passive attitude is decisively shaped by 'the open secret' that politics is the domain of crooked individuals that manifests itself through displays of 'cynicism' about the common good [and] low participation in civic action" (Ganev, 2014a, p. 36). In congruence with this observation, recent interviews and political analysis illustrates Bulgarians tend to perceive their political agency as the opportunity to vote for the lesser of two evils rather than an opportunity to enact real political change (Ganev, 2014a).

In fact, the general perception and distrust of political affiliations is so deep that during the 2013 protests, protesters specifically distanced themselves from any sort of political affiliation, as explicit identification with political actors or institutions would undermine their credibility (Ganev, 2014a). Ganev clearly articulates Bulgarian sentiment

in this regard, as well the pragmatic accommodation of these beliefs by the protestors when he states that in Bulgaria:

> Anyone who claims to speak on behalf of "the people" will inevitably be accused of resorting to noble rhetoric in order to conceal particularistic motivations. Democracy's champions should therefor expect to be maligned as "lackeys of foreign forces," "paid collaborators of ruthless profiteers," or simply "supporters of the opposition. Aware of this problem…. [The protestors] refused to associate themselves with any political organization… they rejected the idea of launching a political organization of their own – no individual group or representative body is authorized to speak on behalf of the protestors. (2014a, p. 41)

Even organizations less profoundly linked to political institutions have struggled to make an impact, as they are similarly seen as elitist and disconnected from the general population due to the fact that "Civil society organizations and NGOs in Bulgaria have been typically donor driven, funded by external sponsors" (Bakardjieva, 2012, p. 1372). The protests of 2013, though initially about basic utilities, also implicated the Bulgarian mediascape. Though it is now no longer subjected to the strict state-determined control of the former Communist regime, the current state of Bulgarian media is far from un-problematic.

THE BULGARIAN MEDIASCAPE

Bulgaria "has a small but competitive media market" (Antonova & Georgiev, 2013, p. 3) but, like many post-communist states, Bulgaria's media market has been forced to adapt to competition with historically nationalized media markets and industries. In stark contrast to the "old centralized and hierarchical pyramid of cultural values maintained by the Zhikov regime" the developing socio-economic conditions within Bulgaria brought about the beginning of a broader and apparently decentralized publishing and media industry (Levchev, 1998, p. 236). However, these changes were not necessarily all for the

better. The state's media industry has been particularly plagued with problems of politicization and corruption, which has brought it under much public and international scrutiny. The corruption in Bulgarian media has proved a consistent issue within the EU as part of the accession process. As indicated by the Open Society Institute, "There is growing concern about media freedom in Bulgaria … In early 2013, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe announced that it would renew the monitoring of media freedom and media ownership transparency in Bulgaria because of the persistent problem" (Antonova & Georgiev, 2013, p. 8). There is little doubt as to the validity of these claims of corruption, as within the country, "only 3 companies control six multiplexes (with strong suspicions that in reality a single company stands behind the three)" (Antonova & Georgiev, 2013, p. 6). In many respects, the void left by the mainstream previously dictated by the state has been filled by a mainstream that is potentially equally hegemonic, and consolidated under the control of privatized companies with questionable political and criminal affiliations. In fact, it is a general understanding that, though unproven, the mafia retains considerably control of the Bulgarian entertainment industry (Antonova & Georgiev, 2013).

Within this context, the Bulgarian press has suffered considerably. In 2013 Bulgaria's incoming American ambassador addressed this particular concern in her inaugural interview, saying that "she had 'heard reports of intimidation of journalists that leads to self-censorship" (Antonova & Georgeiv, 2013, p. 9). These reports were confirmed in 2012 by the Bulgarian journalist, Lidia Pavlova, "who writes on organized crime for the daily newspaper Struma, [and] reportedly received a number of threats. In

May, her son's car was set on fire in the southwestern town of Dupnitsa, where her she and her family [lived]" (Dzhambazova, 2012, p. 1). Shady connections between government officials were yet another catalyst for the protests of 2013, when it was uncovered that "that the proposed government included a horde of deeply compromised individuals" (Ganev, 2014a, p. 36) many of whom were heavily involved as owners or investors in media industries as part of their attempts to consolidate and maintain political power (Dzhambazova, 2012, p. 1). As such, there is an understandable skepticism regarding reliability of media industries – the press in particular. Bulgarian journalism tends to be driven by tabloid pop culture and entertainment news, featuring Chalga (a popular genre of Bulgarian pop-folk dance music) stars and celebrities that are locally mass produced by suspicious media complexes (Ibroscheva, 2009; "Bulgaria's Payner", 2013; Buchanan, 2007). One of these organizations, known as Payner Media Group was recently threatened with an EU inspection upon receiving a development grant in early 2013. Rather than face the inspection, Payner Media quickly returned the funds, saying that they were no longer required, validating skepticism regarding the legitimacy and credibility of powerful actors within the Bulgarian communications and entertainment industry ("Bulgaria's Payner", 2013).

Within the Bulgarian mediascape, mass media as well as creative industries are often implicated within and manipulated to the ends of political corruption – thus undermining their legitimacy as a space for progressive dialogue. Engaging in investigative journalism, traditionally a field dedicated to exposing corruption, has often proved all too dangerous to journalists and their families, meriting swift death threats that history has

proven are all too sincere. If explicitly political fields for community dialogue and expression are either too dangerous to enter, or too compromised to be worthwhile, how does one proceed? In a space where power has been consistently held by "deeply compromised individuals" how can one even begin to imagine an alternative and what might it look like? Fighting against a democratically problematic, though well-warranted social habitus, one might wonder if any avenues remain for the fruitful instigation and manifestation of functional political and social alternatives. It is just such an alternative that KPC proposes in their concept of metamodernism and the embodiment of their own "klaxist" nature (Boyanova, 2014). However, to conceive of how these function, we must now turn to KPC's theoretical understanding of their concrete contemporary environment.

BULGARIA'S POSTMODERN CONDITION

In keeping with its highly theoretical approach, KPC identifies the Post-Communist Era with the arrival of postmodernism within Bulgaria. They link the deconstruction of meta-narrative that characterized the postmodern condition (Lyotard, 1979/1998) with the destabilization of meaning or modern conceptualizations of truth and progress, and growing apathy towards change within Bulgarian society. Due to the lack of what KPC would consider a "true" modern period, they position their community as highly unprepared for the influence of postmodernism, stating that the Post-Communist Era or "next fluctuation" launched Bulgaria

> violently into a postmodernist period within which advantages for a nation in its situation are extremely rare. Already confused by the utter annihilation of their former way of life and in need of something as unifying as communism used to be, Bulgarians are now faced with the realization that as much as one wants truth - you

> couldn't really understand anything anymore because meaning was relative. ("Post-postmodernism", 2012)

Rather than shifting from a modern to postmodern condition, Bulgarian society, according to KPC, had not genuinely achieved modernity. In particular, they were ill equipped, having been denied the opportunity to practice the reflexive approach that Giddens considered so crucial to the successful realization of modern society and identity. While reflexive engagement under communism was a risky endeavor, the lack of reflexive engagement within Bulgarian society had serious ramifications, for "when [modernism] did hit, it began a domino effect which would trap the formerly Red states once again between a rock and hard place and, worst of all, they wouldn't know what to do about it" ("Post-postmodernism", 2012). Understandably, KPC asks, "How can one effectively move from an extremist belief of an absolute truth to a cosmos-like construct like postmodernism, which aims to surround you infinitely in an ether of questions?" stating that the impact of this jarring transition upon the "national mentality were grave and overwhelming - a way of life akin to a morphine-esque apathy" ("Post-postmodernism", 2012).

By KPC's account, the existential quandary that postmodernism brought to Bulgarian society had distinct political implications. The quandary itself is, once again, reflective of the work of Anthony Giddens – though he identifies such a circumstance as indicative of a state of "high modernity," a radicalization of modernism rather than the arrival of a true postmodern condition. For Giddens, high modernity entails a heightened degree or reflexivity, which "takes on a different character. It is introduced into the very

basis of system reproduction, such that thought and action are constantly refracted back upon one another" (1990, p. 38). This has serious implications for modern thought, as it undermines fixed understandings of meaning or reality and therefore this reflexivity "operates, not in a situation of greater and greater certainty, but in one of methodological doubt. Even the most reliable authorities can be trusted only 'until further notice'" (Giddens, 1991, p. 84).

Klaxon describes such a state in their own words, maintaining that the development of paralyzing apathy within Bulgarian culture during the Post-Communist Era was rooted in the reasoning "*If you can't explain anything absolutely, then why bother?"* Describing this existential, but politically impactful, predicament of Bulgarian society, KPC offers a narrow example that details precisely this logic:

> The only thing I can be sure of these days is that everything is, bluntly said, going to shit because I don't know how the fuck to deconstruct anything and, even if I DID my neighbor Ivan's deconstruction will be radically different than mine, furthermore my neighbor Ivan's donkey's deconstruction may also be different and at the same time correct! ("Post-postmodernism", 2012)

Such a crisis of meaning catalyzed the development of an apathetic perspective that, as mentioned before, KPC argues came to characterize Bulgarian culture, and understandably so, for "It was a difficult reality to be faced with after a long period under a rule which allowed for a single type of everything, no travel allowance and never a fucking choice to be had anywhere" ("Post-postmodernism", 2012). Once again, KPC links this dilemma to the arts by referencing iconic postmodern art in the title of this self-contextualizing blog post which details the challenges and changes within contemporary Bulgarian culture – "Post-Postmodernism, or, How Marcel Duchamp's Urinal *Almost* Killed the

Bulgarians." But, according to Klaxon Press, the Bulgarians have survived (despite what they may consider postmodernism's best efforts at deconstruction) and the question remains as to what might follow what they consider to be the postmodern, post-communist turn.

A Second National Revival?

> *So here we are on the tail end of 2012, in a debate about what to call the next era we sense developing. We've pretty much settled on either metamodernism or post-postmodernism - a completely irrelevant semantic debate distracting us from what's really at stake if a concept like this were to take root. It's an embarrassingly underdeveloped discussion which aims to describe current and crucial movement in progressive thought. The name of the game (if not meta or post-postmodernism) is 'change' now more than ever.*
>
> ("Post-Postmodernism," 2012)

It is here, within the midst of political protest and cultural change, that Klaxon Press Collective imagines an alternative course for Bulgarian society and the community of Sofia. Through their engagement with the arts, KPC is able to present a program for change – a guiding concept – in a manner that is not hampered or disparaged by association with the corrupt political realm. In contrast to the apathetic perspective that they maintain has defined Bulgarian consciousness in the base, Klaxon passionately argues that, by embracing change and putting forth some effort, Bulgaria can take its place as "one of the pioneers in the global ushering of the new era" ("Post-postmodernism," 2012). Even so, they admit that while visible in the changes in Bulgarian society, this concept – metamodernism (or post-postmodernism, in the sense that it succeeds the postmodern era) has yet to be fully developed in discussion. What is this movement and how are we to understand it? What future does it envision and possibly even manifest within Sofia?

It is here, in considering the possible adaptation or transcendence of the modern/postmodern distinction, that the work of Richard Kearney offers valuable insight. Where Giddens sees singularity, consistency and radicalization within contemporary modernity, Kearney, valuably recognizes the impact of geographic and cultural context in producing variation. Contrary to Giddens, and akin to the perspective of KPC, he presents the present world as a postmodern one, which (again, in agreement with KPC) induces a social paralysis of meaning and progress. Kearney identifies the imagination as a major player in constructing an antidote for this condition as, in accordance with Anderson, he attributes it with a "schematizing power" which transforms the manifold of experience into a certain spatial/temporal unity" through which "each person, thing, or event can be identified" (Gratton & Manoussakis, 2007, p. 226). Imagination is therefore necessary for a "synthesis of past, present, and future" and the construction of common goals (Rundell, 2007, p. 113). It is through the narrative capacity of the imagination that modernity, or "multiple modernities" are constructed as a means to overcome the "empty shell of simulation and repetition" (Rundell, 2007, p. 113) that typifies the postmodern imagination.

These "multiple modernities" are ones that differ from traditional "Western" standards. Kearney attributes these differences, and the evolution of conceptions of modernity and modern communities, to the uniqueness of the social imaginaries of different communities (Taylor, 2007, p. 39). This is infused with optimism, but is rooted in the pragmatic realities and the observation of distinct differences in the modern institutions even within Western cultures. Kearney argues,

> that we have to speak of multiple modernities, different ways of erecting and animating the institutional forms that are becoming inescapable. We need to get over seeing modernity as a single process of which Europe is the paradigm. We understand the European model as the first, certainly, and as the object of some creative imitation, naturally, but as, at the end of the day, one model among many, a province of the multiform world that we hope (a little against hope) will emerge in order and peace. (Taylor, 2007, p. 44)

Kearney's thoughts provide a valuable amendment to Giddens perspective for the purposes of studying the KP Collective within Bulgaria. The concept of contextually rooted multiple modernities, that are born out of differentiated social imaginaries, affords a flexibility in investigating and legitimizing the imaginative metamodern constructions and manifestations of KPC (the elements of which will be detailed in the following chapter). Though Klaxon distinguishes metamodernity from the modern, such an approach echoes Kearney's postulation of multiple modernities, in that it is similarly a progressive solution specifically tailed to Bulgaria's context and woes that has been contrived to alleviate the crisis induced by a postmodern social condition. Like modernity, KPC's metamodernism is concerned with the national project via "progressive thought" which inherently reaffirms a directional understanding of "progress" and value.

Reflecting upon my own observations while in Sofia, I too perceive a continuity or progressive movement growing within Sofia's community. The aspirations of former students to return and "make a difference" within Bulgaria is identified by KPC as one of the trends which harkens a potential "second coming of Bulgaria's national revival" ("Post-postmodernism", 2012). The inspiration for this study was rooted in a desire to understand the relationship between the arts in Sofia and imagining change. As this contextual

analysis, guided by the self-contextualization of KPC shows, within Bulgaria, aesthetics have been constructed as a distinctly politicized sphere. Thus, the arts continue to provide a unique and, arguably socially validated platform for communal discourse and dreaming. Through its publications and events, KPC directly addresses and navigates the political, economic, and cultural stagnation that has effectively plagued Bulgaria since the end of communism, but in doing so, frames a lively debate about what the future might hold for Bulgaria and its people. It is the task of the following analysis to begin to grasp the various elements of KPC's metamodern re-imagining of the Bulgarian community within Sofia. To do so, I attempt to take advantage of the multifaceted potential of the arts as both a representative and constitutive field of practice, and therefore seek further insight into metamodernism by examining KP Collective's documentary and artistic works, as well as the ways in which this potentially guides, or is manifested within the structure, goals, and event processes of the organization itself.

Chapter 2: Metamodernity & the Klaxon Press Journal

KPC calls for the promotion of Metamodernism in politics, arts, and economy ("Post-postmodernism," 2012), but acknowledges that the conversation regarding this concept is highly underdeveloped. Specifically, those reading their manifesto-esque post are left wondering, what supporting metamodernism in the arts look like. Following the lead of Anderson, Giddens, Kearney, Duncombe, and Schwab, all of whom point to the role of material culture in the process and manifestation of imagination, I hope to contribute to that conversation by mapping the characteristics of Metamodernism as illustrated by the first journal produced by Klaxon Press in the Fall of 2014. This will be followed by a broader analysis of the processes and structure of Klaxon press (as indicated by web content), through which these traits are embodied or manifested, within chapter three. Within this chapter, I propose that, upon review, the first journal produced by Klaxon Press, not only serves as manifest evidence of the community it constructs (and is constructed by), but that it provides insight into key elements of this metamodern communal imaginary and identity. In particular, I note the way that metamodern, glocal (Featherstone & Robertson, 1995), progressive, and "Creative" elements are distinct traits and ideas engaged by this imaginary, as illustrated by their thematic and narrative articulation within this particular journal.

Klaxon Press journal is primarily described as a "Journal of New Bulgarian Literature" and is produced in collaboration with the University of Sofia. This title immediately invokes a sense of a national body of literature, one that evokes and constructs the qualities of the Bulgarian nation and people. Though Benedict Anderson cites the

novel's role in the formation of nationalism, literary scholar Schwab proposes a more extensive project - "to read literary works as 'imaginary ethnographies,'" in order to observe "how literature records, translates, and (re)shapes the internal processing of culture" (Schwab, 2012 p. 7). This study of Klaxon's literary journal is predicated on Schwab's argument, that

> the most fundamental role of literary knowledge consists less in providing information than in facilitating the emergence of new forms of being in language, thought, emotion, and ultimately life, including the emergence of new subjectivities, socialities, communalities, and relationalities. What literature brings forth could not emerge or be conceived in quite the same ways otherwise. (2012, p. 3)

Such a perspective is in alignment with the perspectives of Papastergiadis (2012) and Meskimmon (2010) regarding the affordances of art in constructing, articulating, and manifesting the imaginary, as previously discussed in the Introduction. Works within the journal, such as the prose piece entitled "Lakes," which was submitted under the pen name Ghostdog (p. 19), provide not only vivid descriptions of space (in this case, a tram stop), but also sounds, feelings, and emotions. By Schwab's account, it is for these reasons that, when studying the aesthetic of the imaginary's politics, literature becomes a valuable resource, and an ethnographically inspired approach perhaps the most apt to explore the descriptive intricacies that literary text provides. Such a method recognizes the way in which artistic works, such as prose are not only descriptive, but constitutive of an embedded experience of a particular space or community.

Viewed in this light, the literary arts, as suggested by Anderson (1982), also afford a valuable means for the construction of the national project and modernity. In his work,

Modernity and the Self, Giddens offers that, "As with the other existential arenas, the 'content' of self-identity – the traits from which biographies are constructed – varies socially and culturally. …Reflexive biographies vary in much the same ways as stories do – in terms, for instance, of form and style" (Giddens, 1991, p. 55). Thus, I propose that, in with the kind of observations proposed by Schwab, studying the premier journal published by Klaxon Press and its form, content, and style, provides a unique opportunity to understand, in a culturally sensitive manner, as a start on imaginary ethnography, the self-identity articulated by Klaxon Press Collective and the community it engages, represents, and facilitates. To accomplish this, we must first explore Bulgarian literature more broadly, in order to best position Klaxon's "New Bulgarian" identity, as well as the conceptual evolution and influences of the KPC journal itself.

NEW BULGARIAN LITERATURE

"We sowed roses, but only thorns have come forth."

> The words of Mihalaki Georgiev describing the sentiments of the generation of Bulgaria's National Revival regarding Bulgarian politics post-independence from the Ottoman Empire in the late 1800s as cited in former Bulgarian President Zhelev's final speech. (Bell, 1998a, p.3)

As discussed in Chapter One, the arts, and more generally, aesthetics, have historically played an important role in the re-presentation of society and the negotiation of power. Literature and literary theory, situated in the field of cultural production, was no exception to this. As discussed in the introductory literature review, Bourdieu's concept of field, and more specifically, the field of cultural production, is a sort of "radical contextualization" which attempts to account for the positions of works, the producers of

works, the positions of those producers, the positions occupied by individuals involved in the consecration and legitimization of these works, and finally, the position of this semi-autonomous, relationally-conceived field as a whole, as it is situated within the larger field of power (Johnson, 1993, p. 9). In keeping with Schwab's suggestion of reading literature as "imaginary ethnographies," this section will briefly review traditions, key ideas, and changes within Bulgarian literature, but seek to ameliorate this approach with a Bourdieusian perspective that seeks to socially contextualize these elements beyond the scope of the text.

Levchev observes that Bulgarian culture "devotes enormous attention to two historical themes. The first is the creation of the Slavic alphabet and first Slavic literature on Bulgarian soil, dating back to the mission of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in the 9th century. The second is the Ottoman conquest and the period of what is often called 'Turkish slavery' that lasted from 1396 to 1878" (1998, p. 245). As an imaginary ethnographic approach would suggest, this is clearly evident, for as Vladimir Levchev writes, in comparison to the US (which travels in space) "Balkan nations have less space and their writers prefer to travel in time." He goes so far as to argue that this "national psychology" is "retrospective and pessimistic, the product of historical burden and abuse" (1998, p. 245). While an orientation towards the past is a recurrent theme in Bulgarian literature (Levchev, 1998, p. 245), literature and the arts are by no means exclusively purveyors of pessimism (as the postmodern malaise discussed in the previous chapter seem to might suggest).

Famous literary works, and perhaps more importantly, the beloved characters within these texts illustrate the ways in which literature has previously served as a reflexive

space for the critical construction and positioning of the Bulgarian community and identity. Living in the post-liberation era (after autonomy was granted by Russia in 1878) Konstantinov, and other intellectuals of his generation, were openly critical of the failings of Bulgaria to realize the promises of liberation. In his autobiographical and fictional works, *Do Chikago I nazad* (*To Chicago and Back*) and *Bai Gano*, Konstantinov, clearly utilizes literature to critically negotiate Bulgarian identity in a manner that, though showing admiration for Western modernization, also illustrates a skepticism reflective of Russian *ressentiment* (Russia's critique of the West) (2006, p. 429). In her consideration of Konstantinov's 1894 travelogue, *To Chicago and Back*, Mary Neuberger notes that that the "juxtaposition of nations [Bulgaria and the US], however unreal in their representations, inevitably provoked introspection … In many ways, for Konstantinov, the fair was less about discovering the New World and more about exploring the quintessential nature of his own nation" (2006, p. 427). Even so, Konstantinov's literary encounter between Bulgaria and the New World flips the script, in which the West has traditionally framed the discussion of the other. Instead, it is both "a journey of self-discovery" from a Bulgarian perspective, as well as one that uniquely places the Western world as the space being "discovered" (Neuberger, 2006, p. 427).

Most importantly for our purposes, Konstantinov's invention of the Bulgaria anti-hero Bai Gano, has played a profound role in narrating the relationship between Bulgarian and Western conceptions of modernity. A well-known national figure who regularly appears in contemporary Bulgarian political cartoons (Curticapean, 2008), Bai Gano was introduced in Konstantinov's 1894 travelogue. A Bulgarian rose oil merchant, Bai Gano,

or Gano Balkanski, was "never just a literary hero (or anti-hero)," rather, he was a "full-fledged national phenomenon who 'crawled out of the book' and into the everyday consciousness of the nation" (2006, p. 430). The most analyzed character in Bulgarian literary history, Bai Gano is a man that, though charismatic, is perpetually embarrassing himself with his lack of proper European manners. Bai Gano was a distinct product of his era, in which the traditional and honest Bulgarian tradesman or *ensnaf*, was "replaced by the petit bourgeois capitalist" (Neuburger, 2006, p. 430), and as such (an indirect) commentary on the failings of Stambolov, the present Prime Minister. Though Bai Gano eludes strict categorization as a national or class-based caricature, he, and the narratives he inhabits, illustrate the ever shifting requirements of modernity – as established by the West, which "unwritten and ever-changing" seem "ever out of reach out of reach for east Europeans" (Neuburger, 2006, p. 428). Arguably, this is a reasonable source of the nationally self-critical attitude noted by Petur-emil Mitev (1998, p. 62), as according to Neuberger, such requirements have created a past and present environment in which "many east Europeans… have difficulty seeing themselves without looking at their own reflection in west European eyes; without lamenting their unequal cultural and economic relationships" (2006, p. 428). Though characters like Bai Gano and narrative's like Konstantinov's negotiated the imagined terrain of communal identity and difference, Bulgarian writers came to hold a distinct role within Bulgarian culture that while critical, was nonetheless social.

Specifically, Levchev argues that within Bulgarian society, artists or writers have been imagined as positive figures who function "as the voice of the nation" (1998, p. 250).

This perspective is largely attributed to the role of writers in the Bulgarian Revival of the 19th century who are seen as precipitating the events. In particular, historical characters of this period, such as Khristo Botev and Ivan Vazov, have been enshrined as models of this "romantic, and typically Slavic" understanding of writers and their relationship to society (Levchev, 1998, p. 250). Under communism this understanding shifted, but didn't alter fundamentally, as writers were still expected to either use their position as the "voice of the people" to support the regime, or, were paid off by the regime itself in exchange for their silence – itself a tacit recognition of the revolutionary potential of writers themselves. Absurdly, it was not uncommon during the communist period for writers to live successfully, based not upon what they did publish, but rather, what they did not. While published works were generally subjected to review by figures such as Todor Pavlov, some literary fields were more tightly controlled than others. Specifically, literary theory was often more tightly controlled than literature itself (Levchev, 1998, p. 237), thus, it is not surprising that, as previously illustrated by Lutzkanova (2009), theoretical discourse evolved as a powerful subversive force, with Bulgaria as a nation.

While the values and subjects of traditional Bulgarian literature were generally well established – and exactingly so under communism – which twisted these narratives towards its own political ends, the fall of the regime had extreme implications for literature, writers, and readers. As Bulgarian scholar, Vladimir Levchev, describes,

> The old, stable, and unquestioned hierarchy of values disappeared and was not replaced by a new one. Instead a variety of new hierarchies of values appeared, or perhaps, more precisely, various criteria of evaluation are in the process of appearing and disappearing. Many Bulgarian readers, and writers as well, are often lost in the environment of cultural pluralism, which new for them" (1998, p. 237).

Even so, writers and critics did not let the shifting foundations of Bulgarian politics deter their literary aspirations. Rather than being sidelined by this new environment of pluralism and economic competition, many writers and editors took it upon themselves to become publishers of Bulgarian works. Previously banned "samizdat" literary journals like "Glas" and "Most" became legal publications in 1990, initially selling thousands of copies, however, "competition from new independent magazines and newspapers rapidly reduced the sale of former samizdat editions (Levchev, 1998, p. 237). But Edvin Sugarev and Vladimir Levchev were by no means the only individuals to blend the roles of editor, writer, and publisher (p. 237).

The changing conditions have, consequently, evoked a concomitant change within contemporary Bulgarian literature. The subsequent introduction of other, competing publications has made it increasingly difficult to survive as a writer of what critic Levchev dubs "serious literature" (1998, p. 250). Nevertheless, a new generation of writers such as Georgi Gospodinov, Kristin Dimitrova, and Yordan Eftimov, found some success throughout the 1990s. Though continuing the Bulgarian literary tradition, their work came to reflect the present condition of Bulgarian society and values more critically and reflexively. Levchev cites Dimitrova's award winning poem *I'm a Bad Warden*, as exemplifying this nascent generation of writers. The poem's speaker describes the life of a bird within its cage. The bird sings despite its caged existence, as it has never known anything else and becomes an object for personal reflection, as the speaker continues, "I give him as much food/ As I want to be given myself. / Every day I feel like setting him free./ But I never do it, because/ Freedom is lethal for him./ I already know/ I'm one of

those weak-willed people./ Who wouldn't leave poison/ At the bedside of someone/ Suffering from cancer" (Dimitrova, 1992). Dimitrova's description of weak-will in the face of liberation, for better or for worse, clearly evokes a sense of the ongoing struggle and sense of failure that has characterized Promenite. Within such an environment, and in particular, Bulgaria's developing market economy (in which few had the means to purchase books), writers were forced "to adapt to the quite marginal, and much less heroic, role assigned to them in a developing market economy (Levchev, 1998, p. 250) and compete with "supermarket bestsellers" and "the flourishing yellow press".

Over a decade later, Klaxon Press Collective has begun contributing to the Bulgarian literary tradition, which the publication of what they call "A Journal of New Bulgarian Literature" (2014, p. 1). While some circumstances have changed, and perhaps, certain stresses have lessened, it is clear that Bulgaria has not entirely improved since the civic protests of 1997. Corruption still cripples a great deal of businesses and publications, and poverty remains an issue (Ganev, 2014a). Despite these ongoing difficulties, Klaxon Press Collective, in its rhetoric and the works it publishes, illustrates a turn away from the nostalgic historical narratives and the political apathy and insecurity present within Bulgarian literature. Instead, they present a journal that is available to all persons free of charge, which contains within it works that, while treating similar themes, bring them into conversations with the present, with an overall outlook that is both critical, but comparatively positive. The works included in Volume One of the KPC journal reflect the metamodern zeitgeist that KPC describes in its blog, and re-presents Bulgarian society as critically engaging and negotiating contemporary concerns (such as development and

shifting conceptualizations of national identity) with an eye towards the creation of a more successful future. These re-presentations are by no means idealistic. The journal includes cautionary tales detailing the cost of the loss of identity, images of the instability of the present and the troubling past, and personal descriptions of the uncomfortable task of committing oneself to an imagined future that may or may not come to pass. But on the whole, KPC, and the narratives within its publication, commit to the pursuit of an improved future, with a critical eye towards building both Sofia's art scene and expanding previously imagined notions of Sofia and Bulgaria's potential. In doing so, the publication, and to some extent, its contributors, return to more romantic past notions of artists and writers as individuals who precipitate change and the realization of community.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE KPC JOURNAL & THE INFLUENCE OF ZINE CULTURE

Klaxon dubs its bi-annual production many things – most formally, a Journal of New Bulgarian Literature, but on the organization's website, the publication is referred to as a journal, magazine, and zine (Boyanova, 2014). Published in the fall of 2014, the premier KPC journal is available to the public in Sofia and beyond in both digital and print form. It is definitively interdisciplinary in nature, including works of poetry, prose, short story, photography, and illustration, all of which are solicited from the public and curated by the Klaxon Press editors. In terms of its interdisciplinary format and its inclusion of young artists seeking to move beyond the ranks of amateur, the KPC journal embodies many elements that Duncombe identifies as characteristic of zines (2008, p. 11), which is not surprising, considering the fact that in a 2014 blog interview, Georgieff says she

initially intended KPC's productions to be published as an online zine, but that the publication eventually evolved into its present published form.

Regardless of KPC's shift away from the initial zine format, the journal still shares many traits with zines themselves and zine culture. Stephen Duncombe attends to the role of zines as a collaborative material artifact in the formation of a community and a force of change. Defining zines as "noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves" (2008, p. 11). Duncombe notes that "a minority are run by small collectives...but zines for the most part are the expression and the product of an individual" (2008, p. 15). He then goes on to connect this function to processes of meaning formation, saying,

> We make sense of our world and construct our identities, in significant measure, out of the physical and cultural materials that surround us. ...In our age of mass consumption, more and more of this stuff is being produced not by us but for us, not according to the logic of community tradition or individual inspiration, but according to the pecuniary rationale of the market. The result is a historical separation between us, as individuals, and the entertainment and products we use, enjoy, and derive meaning from. In brief: we are alienated from what we consume. (Duncombe, 2008, p. 113)

The alienation that Duncombe describes from the production of cultural materials is in many ways reflective of the historical processes of state controlled artist production within Bulgaria under the artistic regime of Socialist Realism. The ethic of zine construction runs contrary to this, which will be engaged more fully in the subsequent chapter regarding processes. However, in accordance with Giddens, Duncombe points out the role of zines as institutions within a particular, often dispersed and alienated community: "Communities need institutions. A community is 'a collection of people occupying a more or less clearly

defined are...a community is more than that, it is a collection of institutions.' And when a community is not defined geographically, as the zine community is not, these institutions take on increased importance" (2008, p. 52). For Giddens, it is modern communities that are most desperately in need of institutions which demand an increased degree of reflexivity – a trait which zine culture and Klaxon press also illustrate. This, in turn, directly impacts the process of identity formation within this, for our purposes, metamodern imagined community.

Contrary to other, perhaps more traditional notions of identity formation, "Zines "are not trying to resurrect some sort of pristine identity that only exists outside the web of social construction. In fact, through their zines, they are engaged in the opposite: manufacturing themselves" (Duncombe, 2008, p. 42). Duncombe points to the 1990s American Riot Grrl movement as exemplary of the role of zines in the creation of meaning and identity, stating that "Riot grrl zines, like all zines, are 'continually re-rehearsed self-definition[s].' They offer a way to reject definitions given by the dominant society and replace them with one's own, a ways of 'taking over the means of production in order to create our own meanings," (2008, p. 73). Such an practice engages a different concept of "value" and "authenticity" in relation to identity, one similar to the definition stated by philosopher Charles Taylor, that "the 'modern ideal of authenticity,'… resides in the belief that 'being true to myself is being true to my own originality, and that is something that only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am defining it,'" thus, "What makes [an] identity authentic is that they are the ones defining it" (as cited in Duncombe, 2008,

p. 45). In a similar fashion, Klaxon Press and its contributions draw upon the materials of the past but, through collaborative practice transfer them into something representative of a newly imagined community; one dedicated to manufacturing itself in a manner appropriate to its present day conditions.

However, where KPC's similarity to zines is most evident is in the distinctly personal style of the majority of its narratives and works of prose or poetry. Though perhaps fictional, the personal perspective, in particular, the way in which the world of Sofia is experienced via an informal narrator or speaker suffuses the entire publication. While progressive politics of varying natures are a theme within the publication (which will be addressed later within the narrative analysis), Duncombe indicates that, within zine culture, the presentation of the personal always resonates with political implication;

> Zines put a slight twist on the idea that the personal is political. They broach political issues from the state to the bedroom, but they refract all these issues through the eyes and experience of the individual creating the zine. Not satisfied merely to open up the personal realm to political analysis, they personalize politics, forcing open even what the OED defines as politics with a personalized analysis. (2008, p. 33)

While progressive themes within Klaxon's journal will be addressed shortly, these personal politics are a key element that will be returned to within Chapter Three. As for our current purposes, let us ask more precisely, how, and in what form, is this personalized analysis presented to readers within this publication?

In short, the KPC journal contains a total of thirty-three works of prose, poetry, short story, illustration and photography submitted by a total of fourteen contributors. It opens with a letter from the editors, which includes, first and foremost, a definition of the

term Klaxon: “a loud horn often used as a warning signal and to get someone’s attention” (“Letters from the editors”, 2014). This is followed by a brief description of the organization itself, which is presented as a “youth art collective based in Sofia Bulgaria” (“Letter from the editors”, 2014, p. 8) with the aim of creating “a platform for and provoke discussion about talented young people and their work through the curation of live showcases, an independent press, and collaborations with creative groups in Bulgaria and beyond” (“Letter from the editors”, 2014, p. 8). It closes with the contact info of Klaxon Press Collective and a motto – “You make the art, we do the legwork” (“Letter from the editors”, 2014, p. 8).

As a crucial caveat, it is important to reiterate that the English translations provided by Klaxon Press (and translated by their Creative Director, Monica Georgieff) were the primary source for this investigation. While the English versions of these texts were exclusively subjected to critical inquiry, I am well aware that prose, poetry and literature are all highly difficult to translate and that meaning may not always be precisely conveyed in a different language. However, as these translations are completed and approved by Klaxon itself, I argue for their continued relevance and reliability. Without a doubt, a more thorough investigation of the Bulgarian versions of these works would be an ideal subject of further study - with the added requirement of increased Bulgarian language fluency. But, with a preliminary overview complete, let us turn to an examination of the traits manifested within these works, and the insight they provide into the metamodern imagination and concomitant self-identification process. It is to this end that I dedicate the remaining portions of this chapter, the rest of which will be organized into loose categories of

suggested traits of "metamodernity" that emerge upon study of the text – each section of which will elucidate the way which these traits are thematically and narratively engaged and articulated.

WRITING THE METAMODERN

In a 2014 interview, Georgieff argues that Klaxon Press Collective is neither modern, nor postmodern. Rather, using their own name as the root of the term, she describes it as "Klaxist" (Boyanova, 2014), an adjective that furthers the metamodern project as it denotes a desire to transcend the perceived modern vs. postmodern dichotomy. In doing so, KPC's Klaxist approach is a metamodern one, which, through a strategic application of modern and postmodern though, constitutes a metamodern program that is developed out of the Bulgarian context. One of the dominant thematic threads carrying through the entirety of the journal is the desire for various means to deal with the specific challenges of contemporary Bulgarian society and culture, many of which were detailed in Chapter One. More specifically, the works within the premiere Klaxon Journal are thematically engaged in negotiating the transition from the traditional community to the metamodern or post-traditional (and post-communist) community (and its apparent accompanying instability of meaning), as well as in what Giddens's identifies as the crucial modern project of the reflexive construction of self-identity, both in individual and communal terms. Crucially, I understand the thematic engagement of the works in the journal as by no means prescriptive, and I do not mean to present them in fixed terms. Rather, I present the following sections in the hope that they aid in organizing the multitude

of personal perspectives and approaches to these topics, as presented within the publication, in a more focused and intelligible manner.

One of the key challenges that is consistently being negotiated throughout many of the works of the KPC Journal is the transition from traditional society to metamodern society. As its appellation suggests, within traditional society

> traditional modes of practice are dominant, the past inserts a wide band of "authenticated practice" into the future. Time is not empty, and a consistent "mode of being" related future to past. In addition, tradition creates a sense of the firmness of things that typically mixes cognitive and moral elements. The world is as it should be. (Giddens, 1991, p. 48)

Such an environment provides a comparatively fixed sense meaning and relation to reality, or ontological security (Giddens, 1991, p. 49). Throughout the KPC journal, traditional practices, in particular the combination of these with the interaction with older generations and memories are repeatedly encountered within narratives and prose. In his untitled poem, Avgustin Gospodinov details a conversation between the speaker and his grandfather. While the conversation itself is about women and the role of flaws in creating beauty, the poem begins with a line that sets the scene - "Grandpa and I took to sipping our coffee/" (2014c, p. 104, ll.1). While their conversation does not conclude by the end of the poem, the poem itself is drawn to conclusion when the Grandfather drains "his coffee in the sink/ poured us some brandy and we drank" (2014, p. 104, ll. 9-10). As evidenced by personal field notes and experience, enjoying café with friends and family is common occurrence, if not daily tradition within Sofia. The pair's later transitioning to brandy or Rakiya – a libation of decidedly higher proof that is traditionally Bulgarian liquor -- evokes an even

stronger sense of history within the present moment, offering the ontological security and comfort that tradition affords (Giddens, 1991).

However, we can also see the results of the transition between this passing traditional society and the coming of metamodernism. For many narrators and characters within the journal's included works, this transition is challenging, frustrating, if not wholly traumatic. This is arguably because "Modernity, it might be said, breaks down the protective framework of the small community and of tradition, replacing these with much larger, impersonal organization" (Giddens, 1991, p. 34). Within such an environment, "The individual feels bereft and alone in a world in which she or he lacks the psychological supports and the sense of security provided by more traditional settings" (Giddens, 1991, p. 34). Vulko, the Degenerate, the antagonistic protagonist of Boris Burner's short story *Clusters of Life* is a disturbing example of the impact of such a traumatic transition upon a previously kind and functional individual. The short story opens with the words "*He felt like a shackled stray, in the way of passing cars*" (Burner, 2014, p. 42) immediately introducing the dominant themes of abandonment and change. This is followed immediately by the phrase "Constant spinning gets annoying" (2014, p. 42), which articulates a clear sense of disorientation and frustration. All of this introduces the reader to Vulko before we even know his name or receive a more detailed description of the story's setting. In contrast to the spinning and the swift movement of vehicles, the narrative then shifts to a description of its primary setting – the small rural town of Gigen, which is drawn in strict relief to the disorienting movement of the modern city:

> This year has been so fruitful, everything just bloomed and grew. Entire handfuls of clusters of white and red. …There is only one wire in the village. There are around that many citizens of Gigen also. The remaining ones are barely alive. If they walk, they walk with a prosthetic leg, sometimes even two. Young people were never seen in the village. They didn't come for holidays, they never came to see or mourn grandma and grandpa when they passed away. There was no one to pick the heavy vines either. (2014, p. 42)

Gigen remains fruitful in its relative abandonment, an empty pastoral image of a traditional Bulgarian vineyard village. As the village appears less than whole, without its residents, the remaining aged villagers have not fared much better. One of these persistent residents is Vulko, Gotse's son, who was once kind with a big heart (2014, p. 46). However, upon the death of his father and the abandonment of Gigen by its youth (in favor of the city), Vulko is thrown into crisis and doubt, and is bathed with "impenetrable waves of evil bathed…as he realized that the world as he knew it no longer existed" (2014, p. 46). Looking to the past, he invokes memories with Grandma Tonke (who is no longer living), crying, "Grandma Tonke, do you remember when there used to be icons on the walls of the church and a priest would come to sing at funerals?… Tell me, Grandma Tonke?" (2014, p. 45). However, he receives no answer or solace, and thus makes a deal with the Devil -- a deal in which he takes on the role of the Reaper, and subsequently becomes twisted individual with a diseased heart (2014, p. 46), murdering cats and tortures beasts without wondering why (2014, p. 44).

Motivated by his loneliness and rage, Vulko the Degenerate becomes a murderer, as, "In his loneliness, he seemed to know somehow, how the presence of another soul would only make him lonelier in time. Whenever he found someone wandering around

these lands, he would bash him over the head so that he would stay. That is one of the reasons why the place was so empty, and the only cemetery was full" (Burner, 2014, p. 44). However, even in his refusal to leave Gigen and his adherence to tradition, ritual rings hollow, as evidenced by the crosses that he places on the graves of victims. Contrary to the icons from that church in the time of Grandma Tonke, Vulko cannot figure out what the crosses "are for, or where it came from, or what it did. He didn't know why it was custom. However, he insistently tied crosses, because he had to, it was just one of the ways he kept the balance intact" (2014, p. 45). Ultimately the narrative concludes with imagery of the ripening vines which grow from the burial grounds of the town's inhabitants, heralding the potential for productive rebirth.

While Vulko provides an example of an individual trumped by the transition from a traditional framework to a modern one, a larger number of works within the KPC journal, detail the crucial reflexive modern project – the construction of self-identity. Thankfully, and more happily, though this process is challenging, the majority of characters and speakers undertaking this task are successful (unlike Vulko) and illustrate two primary means by which this construction is accomplished. In particular, self-identity is presented as being constructed in two primary ways, via the reworking of past events, stories and histories in order to prepare for the future, and via relationships with others. In addressing personal histories, imagery of tradition again becomes apparent. In Den Stefanova's poem *Your Room Forever,* national folk remedies are employed not to preserve the past but to help with the stomaching of the self-identity of the present:

> my mouth is enflamed with the taste of the brew/ with which my mother used to cure me/ when I was little I remember/ the cupboard in the cellar/ or the bread box in which she kept it/…
> three table spoons every day by force/ national medicine honey walnuts and brandy/ habits tend to sprout when you're five/ I tried desperately to be unlike my own hands… (Stefanova, 2014, p. 84, ll. 1-10)
> because habits arrive early to meetings/ three times a day until it stops being bitter/ you chase down your whole identity (2014, p. 84, ll.17-19)

These passages echo Giddens' observation that within modernity, "the reflexive construction of self-identity depends as much on preparing for the future as on interpreting the past, although the 'reworking' of past events is certainly always important in this process" (Giddens, 1991, p. 85). The interpretation and re-working of the past reappears throughout Stefanova's multiple works, including the poem *Salt in the Wounds* in which one reveals one's veiled self "with stories/ about yourself/ from the past/" (Stefanova, 2014, p. 82, ll. 8-11). Similarly, in Rosen Kukushev's poem *I am Scared of Inspiration,* the speaker expresses the fear that inspiration might run out or "might peek inside me and look under my skin" and continues, saying that "language is such a never ending valley of dead poets/ and the lines – they are such unpredictable bridges through time/" (2014, ll.2-4 p. 13) Within Kukushev's poem, the past is always threatening the present, and thus, both masks and complicates achieving and manifesting one's sense of self. It is for this reason that the speaker is left struggling for self-identity – a process described in lines 13 and 14: "I often fall asleep this way – flying over the words/ never even getting to the root of the matter/ being the Real You amidst storms of unwanted/ tears of shadows pouring from time in pools/" (2014, ll. 19-22 p. 13-14). But the difficulty of such an endeavor does not prevent the speaker from seeking such an understanding, nor quell the desire for enacting "the Real

You" (2014, ll.21 p.14). Though the renegotiation of the past is a common approach to the construction of self-identity within the works included in KPC's first journal, perhaps even more common is the accomplishment of this project via relationships with others.

To begin, it is necessary to state that the construction of modern, and arguably also metamodern self-identity is not easily achieved via just any relationship. Rather, it necessitates "a pure relationship" in which, according to Giddens,

> the individual does not simply 'recognise the other' and in the responses of that other find his self-identity affirmed. Rather … self-identity is negotiated through linked processes of self-exploration and the development of intimacy with the other. Such processes help create 'shared histories' of a kind potentially more tightly bound that those characteristic of individuals who share experiences by virtue of a common social position. (1991, p. 97)

It is through such relationships that "Shared histories are created and sustained" (Giddens, 1991, p. 97); histories required by metamodernity. Within Volume One of the KPC journal, these relationships are, for the most part, portrayed as romantic. For example, in Stefan Ikoga's work of prose, *Tell Me About Me*, the relationship between the unnamed male and female primary characters functions as a primary space of negotiation of self-identity and source of self-knowledge. The piece begins with the characters exclaiming, "-Tell me about me! /-Tell me about me!" (Ikoga, 2014, p. 56, ll.1-2). Demanding knowledge about themselves from the one who knows them best, they debate their future and through their engagement with each other are able to avoid the slippery slope into fatalism, the ultimate refusal of modernity and progress (Giddens, 1991, p. 110). Initially, the couple yearns strangely for the security of an eschatological nature, saying

> -Can you imagine if the world were to end right now? While we're whispering and watching each other and talking about the world, but also mostly about ourselves, this bright, white light could penetrate the black curtains and the blinds and seconds later, turn us into the ashes of an atomic explosion?
> -Yes, it would be wonderful. It would be wonderful because tomorrow everything is ending. I'm going far away, and you're staying here. (Ikoga, 2014, p. 57)

However, despite the sense of security offered by imminent obliteration of a nuclear nature, they refuse to give in to the impulse out of love for one another. When it seems all is lost to fatalistic impulses, the man exclaims, "you won't be able to erase yourself, you can try but you can't" (2014, p. 59). In the end, both decide to commit to weathering an uncertain future together, as "the white light from behind the blinds still wasn't coming" and even though "He felt awkward for loving her so much without the certainty of the end of the world [and] She felt the same way" (2014, p. 59).

Yordan Radichkov participates in this same project but via a different form – a dystopian short story. The narrative, entitled *The New Gods*, begins with an identity crisis, when the protagonist "[looks] in the mirror and notice[s] that [his] face had left [him]. It just wasn't there anymore" (Radichkov, 2014, p. 90) While he is concerned, it becomes clear that previously, this was not an aspect of himself that had been given a great deal of attention, as he decides that "It was highly probably that I simply had not taken note of it earlier because I don't spend that much time in front of the mirror anyway" (2014, p. 90). Even so, he cannot seem to fully eradicate his concerns about his loss of self-identity, and instead, sits "in front of the mirror and watch[es] the image of the person reflected there. I know it's me but those characteristic features I am so used to are not there…I take a look at my watch and decide I really don't have time to worry about my face" (2014, p. 90).

While concerned about his lack of self-recognition, it does not take priority. Contrary to this, the protagonist heads to work when he is told to attend the "cult meeting" where he and his compatriots will witness "the birth of the new gods" (2014, p. 91). It is here that the crisis reaches a pinnacle, and he determines that rather than live within "this black nothing" (2014, p. 91) he would prefer an alternative one and throws himself off of the top off the building. In the end however, he is finally rescued when he sees a young woman who has retained her face, and upon witnessing her, he grasps the ledge and sees his reflection, face returned, in the reflective window of the building (2014, p. 93). The tale concludes before the events of the narrative are fully resolved. Instead the reader is left with the image of the two individuals, faces and identities intact, facing off against the faceless crowd and the all-consuming, destructive oily-blackness of the emergent new gods.

METAMODERNITY & GLOCALITY

Rather than being purely restricted to the modern national project or context, another metamodern element within the contents of the KPC journal, as well as the structure of the journal itself is that of glocality. I engage this term as it evokes most directly the bridging of boundaries and blending of the national and international at play within Klaxon Press Collective's publication. The term itself was re-invented by Roland Robertson to explore the shifting relationship between the global and the local. Robertson invokes glocalization to explore spaces in which cultures come into contact (Block, 2004), and to "signify the interpenetration of the 'particular' and the 'universal' (Featherstone & Robertson, 1995, p. 30)." The "interpenetration" of cultures in contact has also been

addressed by hybridization theory, which "Nederveen Pieterse (1995) … understood as the natural mingling and mixing which goes on when the global meets the local" (Block, 2004). With the increasingly mediated nature of the connection and interactions between the global and the local, it is necessary to acknowledge media as a space and impetus for re-imagination, re-negotiation, and re-articulation of the local in relation to the global or transnational.

As Giddens (1991) and Anderson (1982) observe, material culture, and media (texts in particular) have "played a major role in completing the separation of space from place, but this process only became a global phenomenon because of the integration of printed and electronic media" (Giddens, 1991, p. 25). Klaxon Press Collective is one such example of this globalizing contemporary phenomenon of integrated printed and electronic media, as well as one that, through the engagement of bi-linguiality, further transcends the differences between spaces and cultures. However, the content of the journal is also implicated in this process of shifting the relation of the global and the local. Giddens argues that

> The media offer access to setting with which the individual may never personally come into contact; but at the same time some boundaries between settings that were previously separate are overcome ... The media, especially the electronic media, alter the 'situational geography' of social life…. As a result, the traditional connection between "physical setting" and the "social situation" has become undermined; mediated social situations construct new communalities – and differences – between preconstituted forms of social experience. (1991, p. 84)

Within the narratives presented within the KPC Journal, this renegotiation of the cultural or "situational geography" is manifested within two key tropes. The first is an emphasis on departures and returns – the comings and goings of individuals between spaces, which

serves to reconstitute their relation to one another. The second is a focus on the local, but with an aim towards repositioning it, and individuating it, within a broader, more global framework.

Giddens's observation of the "stretching" that occurs as part of the conditions of "high modernity", or, similarly, in KPC's terms – metamodernity, is reflected in the theme of departure and return, which are recurrent throughout the publication's many works. By no means are the repercussions of this stretching entirely positive or negative, nor do they provide a thematically cohesive body of experience. Instead, these departures and returns range from the mournful parting of two lovers or friend, and the promise of return (Hristova, 2014, p. 63) or the abandonment of the vengeful Vulko (Burner, 2014, p. 46) the degenerate living in a deserted rural village which all of the young people have left for the big city or elsewhere. Within Bilyana Hristova's poems, *All Mine* and *All Mine 2***,** departures and returns are thick with romantic nostalgia and promise. Upon a departure, the speaker observes that "every day is slightly sadder now. /drowned in a nostalgic recollection' and, as if to a memory bound, / the naked soul crumbles" (Hristova, 2014, p. 63, ll.1-4). However, these "farewells" and "hidden tears" lead to the promise that "I'll return one day and stay" (2014, ll.8, p. 63) and these relationships once again come to the fore, revealing truth and ensuring stability (2014, p. 63, ll. 10-12). *All Mine 2* similarly works through a process of departure and return, which again moves from promises - "say you'll stay" (2014, p. 65, ll.1, 5, 9, 13), to waiting and negotiating distance -"not closer but not farther either" (2014, p. 65, ll. 10), which also concludes with a return (2014, p. 65, ll. 15-16). This theme of departure and return, of coming and going, and the personal impact

of this process, is also accompanied by a distinct focus on local spaces, but with an aim to reposition said space within a broader, global context.

Metamodernity by no means denies the importance of the local and the national, but rather than staying within national boundaries, extend the modern nation into a global context, a break with the national focus of modernity. Within Volume One of the Klaxon Press Journal, the Bulgarian experience, and in particular, the location of Sofia, serves as the primary focus. In fact, Sofia is the birthplace or current location of the majority of the contributing authors (Contributors, 2014, p. 109-115). However, the publication also includes contributors who are visitors to Sofia, expats currently in residence there, and former Sofia or Bulgarian locals now living abroad. The Journal concludes with brief paragraphs highlighting each contributor, which, for the most part, provide a brief biography of the contributor, and often include their place of study (for higher education) and current location. Based upon the contributor paragraphs, nine of the fourteen were born in or "from" Bulgaria. Of the six that mention their education, two were educated at the University of Sofia, and four were educated abroad. The photographic contributions of one English expat (currently living in Sofia) are also included, but it is evident that the photographs themselves take Sofia as their subject.

In this way, the perspective offered on this particular geographic (photographic) and cultural space, as well as the realities of Sofia itself, is positioned within a broader, international experiential context. Giddens notes that the study of contemporary cities

> in any part of the world, [demands awareness] that what happens in a local neighborhood is likely to be influenced by factors – such as world money and commodity markets – operating at an indefinite distance away from that

> neighborhood itself. The outcome is not necessarily, or even usually a generalized set of changes acting in a uniform direction, but consists in mutually opposed tendencies. (1990, p. 64)

These connections and tendencies are visible in numerous ways within the poetics and images of the publication itself. Burner's (2014) narrative of Vulko provides small town imagery of traditional rural winemaking town, of life as it used to be in Bulgaria, and of the impact of the present day via both vivid descriptions of the narrative's setting, but also the, albeit twisted, struggles of the antagonist to deal with change. In contrast, several of the poems, prose pieces, and short stories provide rich, emotional and more humorous images of daily life in the city and the various "modes of being in the world" enacted there.

A particularly joyous example of this can be found in Baltadzhiev's work, *If I had Been Born Anywhere Else*, which explores the daily experiences of a resident of Sofia and their interactions with the local community. After a series of events, all of which take place on a tram and, though slightly absurd, would, within Sofia, constitute fairly mundane events, the narrator reflects upon the community formed through such shared experiences, which are distinctly local in nature. He describes the feeling of community that builds within the bus, saying

> The excitement in the tram was on the verge of boiling over. We all beamed and traded conspiratorial looks across the trolley, sharing our inside joke. And I was really quite happy then, because I understood, that nowhere else in the world would this series of insignificant events cause a sense of bonding between strangers living in the same city. (Baltadzhiev, 2014, p. 78-80)

Here, Sofia, is not merely recognized as a special local community, but one which retains an individual presence and similarly, a unique community, within a scope that is global, rather than merely national, or European. This re-envisioning, or, as Anderson (1982)

might say, "re-presentation" of Sofia, also occurs via other mediums, especially the photographs of James Crouchman, an English expatriate currently residing in the capitol. The photographs (of which there are four) all emphasize the community and geography of Sofia itself. One shows passengers either exiting or boarding a bus like the one described in Baltadzhiev's narrative, providing a striking image of community which is bright and active (Crouchman, 2014a). Within this image, Sofia is represented as a space that is populated with individuals. Yet another of Crouchman's photos focuses on the image of the man exiting the darkness of a dilapidated apartment block and walking out into the bright daylight (2014b). Although his face it not visible, the image evokes movement and contrast, and the brightness a striking sense of positivity and movement.

Such images are in distinct contrast to those that seem to embody the works of Rosen Kukushev, who, in his poem, *I am Scared of Inspiration*, which describes "industrial smog/ outlines of botched/ urbanization / like the palm of a fortune teller/" (2014, ll.23-26 p. 14). Crouchman's photographs illustrate this reality as well, with three of his images focusing on grey urban spaces that are empty of any trace of community. One series of two photos shows a bridge or walkway, which provides a vista over which the viewer can see a veritable jungle of concrete housing blocks, some of which are in clear states of disrepair (Crouchman, 2014c). The avenue itself is empty and the wire fencing which closes it in on both sides is keeling over inwards, in the slow stages of its inevitable collapse (2014c). A train station appears similarly empty, without passengers or train cars. Again photographed in black and white, the train station is stark and still, with concrete angles and a sense of a void in a space where one might expect to encounter a space full of momentum

(Crouchman, 2014d). However, despite the fact that Crouchman's images do not all provide the same sense of community, optimism and brightness, they do all present their subjects as valuable ones. While some of the scene may appear derelict and empty, they also exude a stark beauty and sense of history. They are spaces that do not present a sense of joyous individuality, but instead confront the realities of Sofia's physical landscape and history. These realities are then re-presented to the viewer as not only something worth looking at, but a space to inhabit, providing another avenue through which Sofia can be experienced as a locale (in all of its facets) by readers elsewhere.

METAMODERNITY'S PROGRESSIVE POLITICS

Beyond negotiating the metamodern relations between the local and global, the contents of the KPC journal also address another crucial metamodern concern, the relationship between the past and future, thus positioning and re-presenting the local and national identity as progressive, without denying the challenges imposed by a problematic history. Poems like Georgi Belorechki's *Walnut Woe* humorously encapsulate the absurdities encountered when striving for progress; "Someone told him/ to eat walnuts/ to get smarter. / Nobody mentioned/ not to crack them/ on his head" (2014, p. 108, ll. 1-6), but whether called high modernity or postmodernity, metamodernity has been conceived as the constructive alternative to this present environment; one that combines current processes and technologies with more traditionally modern i.e. nationalistic frameworks. Metamodernity is thus not a regurgitation of past nationalist rhetoric, but a newly adapted formulation of that narrative, which imagines Sofia, Klaxon Press, and its participants, as

members of a difference kind of community – one that affords different identities and potentialities.

Poems like Stefan Ikoga's *Easy to Hate* illustrate a very real threat to community formation within Bulgaria and the Balkan Peninsula at large, the exclusive construction of identity and community based upon ethnic criteria. However, the poem concludes with the hope that such an approach can be transcended with an aim towards the recognition of personhood. The *Easy to Hate* is constructed as a series of stanzas, each detailing negative stereotypes of a particular ethnic or national group. The first several stanzas begin with the phrase "I hate the" after which, the following lines detail elements of specific derogatory stereotypes. No one is safe from its scrutiny, be they Jewish, Black, Arab, Indian, Roma, Japanese, or Asian. Even the white speaker is not exempt from loathing; "It is enough for me to just to catch/ a glimpse of myself in the mirror/ to get mad at myself for being white/" (Ikoga, 2014, p. 32, ll.) However, in the final portion of the poem, this approach is inverted, as it concludes with "I love people. / I hate the fact that they are/separated into groups made so/ easy to hate" (2014, p. 33). Abruptly, the poem shift to a brief, but clear commentary -- suggesting the need for inclusion based upon shared humanity. Strikingly, by inverting its approach and shifting from hate to love, the poem suggests the possibility of transcending ethnic differences without erasing difference, one of the challenges of inclusive community formation everywhere, but particularly within the Balkan Peninsula (where a history of ethnic fragmentation of community led to the coining of the term "Balkanization"). Though this term is problematically broad, largely pejorative to the region, and reductive of its structural challenges, it nonetheless addresses elements of a

harsh reality of ethnic discrimination in Bulgaria, where prejudice against groups such as the Roma population remains a social problem (Kourkoulas, 2006; Zhelyazkova, 1998), albeit one that the speaker of Ikoga's poem hopes to amend.

Baltadzhiev's *If I had Been Born Anywhere Else* also deals with issues of equality and inclusion. Set on a public bus, it details the response of the driver and passengers as a gypsy woman joins them –

> a gypsy woman got on with her daughter. Suddenly, a man's voice:
> -Attention! Keep an eye on your bags!
> That's what we were all waiting for. The ice was broken and because there was nothing else to do in the confinement of the tram, we decided to talk about what we know. In response to the man's warning a woman accusingly asked him, using the informal 'you':
> -Who are you referring to?" (Baltadzhiev, 2014, p. 78)
> "I looked behind me and saw the blushing man whom the woman had addressed. He defended himself, replying, that he didn't mean anyone in particular.
> -It was just a general warning.
> At that moment, another man joined the conversation:
> -Madam, what does it matter who he was referring to when it is absolutely clear he meant the gypsy woman with the child? I have been a police officer for thirty years and it doesn't matter at all, gypsy woman or not, I would strip everyone here until we discover whatever has been stolen….
> They started arguing. (2014, p. 78-79)

Baltadzhiev's description of the multitude of individuals on the bus and their equally multiple responses to everyday circumstances also bring issues of social justice to the forefront, but in a manner in which addressing these problems is normalized and encouraged. Rather than the discriminatory opinion of the bus driver holding sway, it is instead critiqued by a cacophony of onlookers in an argument that quickly becomes the center of attention.

Along with addressing social issues of discrimination, the artistic works within Klaxon's Fall 2014 journal also promote a different kind of progressive outlook, one that is unique in its hope for an improved future and recognizes this potential within Sofia's community. In fact, it is this sentiment that concludes Baltadzhiev's entertaining narrative. After a series of what might normally be absurd and frustrating quotidian events, including foul smelling fellow passengers and a Mafioso's wife with terrible driving skills, Baltadzhiev describes how,

> On the way to the next stop, the entire tram was wracked by waves of laughter. All the other strangers walking in the street had no idea what had just transpired but, seeing our smiling faces passing by, they smiled and waved in turn, as though we were all part of the Bulgarian Olympic team on our way to the Games. Some hours late, I imagined the sincere laughter which would carry over the cemetery at Malashevtsi. (2014, p. 80)

The laughter and positivity that Baltadzhiev's narrator imagines brightening even the nearby cemetery is echoed in the illustrated work of Sevda Semer. In her first illustration, this brightening is quite literal, as the image of a young woman holding what appears to be a geometric shining jewel is accompanied by the caption, "The day is bright" (Semer, 2014, p. 15). A bright sun is also present in her second image, a playfully sketched and scruffy young man who appears to be enjoying a daily venture to some place, even if he does happen to be spitting to the side, without a care (Semer, 2014, p. 41). Perhaps the most playful and imaginative of the bunch what appears to be a portrait of a creature akin to a ferret that's been anthropomorphized with his very own monocle.

The next two sketches retain this playfulness, but in a more romantic manner, as the third includes the sketch of a young man with the caption "you have his heart" (Semer,

2014, p. 49) followed by an equally sweet illustration of yet another exhausted looking young man which is captioned "I am tired but I have a date after work☺" (Semer, 2014, p. 67). This engages a prominent theme of many of the works included in the publication, that of romance, relationships, and falling in love. These elements are always romanticized and intimate, rather than veering towards explicit sexuality that lacks emotional engagement. In general, romance within the works of Klaxon Press reflects the ideas Giddens portrays in his description of "pure relationships," but furthermore is linked to what he observes as a sign of "the return of the repressed" (1991, p. 13). Citing Alberoni (1983), Giddens says that

> the experience of falling in love – rather than day-to-day sexual encounters – epitomizes this phenomenon. Falling in love, in contrast to most forms of sexuality, is intense, exalting and specifically "extraordinary." At these times, sexuality becomes the means by which life explores the frontiers of the possible, the horizons of the imaginary and of nature. (1991, p. 206)

In fact, within the entirety of the journal, falling in love is not only emphasized, but its alternative, "day-to-day sexual encounters," is openly treated with distaste. In his dystopian narrative, *The New Gods*, Radichkov's protagonist speaks to a friend, concerned about the apparent loss of all of their faces and subsequently, identities. In response his friend, "warns [him] not to comment on this whole thing with the faces and the white dotted lines," saying,

> It's better not to talk about it…It's just better that way. If you tell somebody else, what you just told me, you won't be able to think about the topic any longer. Shut up about it and try to hang around the girls a bit more. Their standards are so low these days. Don't pay attention to the other stuff. And don't be late for the meeting" (Radichkov, 2014, p. 92).

In response to this, the protagonist feels ill, with bile rising in his mouth (Radichkov, 2014, p. 92). Clearly, within the imaginary of KPC, genuine relationships are privileged over

random encounters. Such relationships provide the unique affordance of assistance in negotiating self-identity within a confusing modern environment toward progressive ends.

METAMODERN CREATIVITY

Finally, the metamodern imaginary and metamodern identity clearly indicates a distinct creative element which is evident in both the works of the KPC Journal and the text's manifest existence itself. Giddens defines modern creativity as "the capability to act or think innovatively in relation to pre-established modes of activity" (1991, p. 41). The aspect of creativity and its innovative, generative nature is embodied both in the very existence of KPC journal, which presents itself as evidence to the creative capacity of this community, but also within dialogues on creativity within pieces such as Belorechky's *Flat Artists* and an untitled work of poetry by Avgustin Gospodinov. The capacity to create via artistic processes is debated between Belorechky's two characters. The story's narrator is a frustrated roommate, who's irritated by the hackneyed artistic works of his fellow co-habitant. The falsity of his annoying roommate's endeavors is finally revealed when he confesses, saying "I can't actually paint at all, but I love tracing" (Belorechky, 2014, p. 99). Comparatively, the speaker of Gospodinov's poem is spontaneously overcome by the creative impulse while riding the bus, where the speaker encounters a young woman, about whom he writes a poem. Without pen and paper at hand, he makes use of the only tool he does have, "all it can do is type this out/as a message on my old Nokia/ and save you in DRAFTS" (Belorechky, 2014a, ll. 25-28 p. 17). Similarly, Crouchman's photos, as previously discussed, illustrate and creative re-presentation of space via artistic work. Crouchman's photos can be seen as creative reclamations of space and historical narrative.

Though it is perhaps a less evident characteristic than the others previously discussed, creativity, as expressed within the act of artistic production, is a thematic element within the works of the Journal. More importantly, however, the metamodern characteristic of creativity is the fundamental pre-requisite for the existence of the publication itself – a journal comprised of creative works.

CONCLUSION

The material included within KPC's first journal conveys a communal imaginary and self-identity that is dedicated to addressing the realities of contemporary Bulgaria via the productive re-imagination of the past and the reflexive construction of self-identity. It is also engaged in negotiating glocality and the shifting relations between the local and the international. These relationships are imagined and navigated by individuals and communities within the published works as represented by reoccurring motifs of departure and return, and by a re-presentation of the locale of Sofia within a comparatively glocal context. Importantly, the works which comprise the journal engage challenging emotional realities of these processes, and provide not only examples of their successful navigation, but the experience of the processes themselves, and perhaps most disturbingly, the very harsh reality and danger than can ensue when these processes fail, or are rejected. The present realities of exclusion and dysfunction are also negotiated by the metamodern communal identity imagined by KPC, which emphasizes addressing these issues with a progressive politics that is both proactively positive and hopeful, as well as inclusive. Finally, creativity emerges as an important trait and practice within the metamodern community, as it is necessary for the re-imagination of history in relation to the quotidian

present, as well as preparation for the future, via the creative imaging of communities like the metamodern one aspired to by Klaxon Press Collective.

Chapter 3: Manifesting the Metamodern in Process & Practice

As illustrated in Chapter One, during the communist regime (and similarly during "the changes" - with its challenges of corruption and gangsterism) the role of the aesthetic in re-presenting the relations between culture, national history, local identity, and social, economic, and political practices has been undeniable. But, while this has functioned as a means of constructing and maintaining power and control, "incorporating new images into visual representations of the city can be democratic. It can integrate rather than segregate social and ethnic groups, and it can also help negotiate new group identities" (Zukin, 1996, p. 20). In Chapter Two, this re-presentation of Sofia and its community was explored via a literary analysis of Klaxon Press Collective. However, if we are truly to understand the way in which KP Collective is most fully re-imagining and *manifesting* communal identity, it is necessary to address art and artistic process in a more holistic manner which takes into account not only the product itself (the KPC Journal) and its position (the context), but also its process of production and community engagement. This approach is in keeping with the theoretical framework of this study, for as Bourdieu (1993) points out, art is inextricable from it context, material practices, and the community in which it is produced.

This chapter will examine the way in which KPC imagines and manifests the metamodern beyond its published journal. Hence, the following analysis draws primarily from non-journal web content available on the KPC website, i.e. their blog, website, and the linked pages within the website's "press" section. Based upon this data, this chapter is dedicated to exploring the ways in which the previously identified elements of the KP Collective's re-imagined "metamodernity," metamodern community, and self-identity are

manifested and enacted within the organization's structure and processes, as well as its collaborative interaction with other organizations, spaces, and events. In doing so I hope to present the ways in which KPC embodies the observation of Sharon Zukin, that "artists themselves have become a cultural means of framing space" (Zukin, 1996 p. 23) as well as the practical manifestations of metamodernity accomplished and aspired to by Klaxon Press Collective. The latter will be structured thematically as per their presentation in Chapter Two, but will utilize a theoretical perspective that, in contrast to the literary focus of the previous chapter, is rooted within an understanding of art as media and alternative media literature.

ART, ALTERNATIVE MEDIA & PROCESS

In his work *Modernity and the Self*, Anthony Giddens argues for the centrality of mediation to human experience, stating that "Virtually all human experience is mediated – through socialization and in particular acquisition of language. Language and memory are intrinsically connected, both on the level of individual recall and that of the institutionalization of collective experience" (1991, p. 23). Although Giddens here defines "mediation" in the broadest sense, contemporary communications and arts media are nonetheless important for the "institutionalization of collective experience" that he describes. However, one should not understand the role of this media as strictly archival or artifactual; rather, as shown by Bourdieu, and scholars of art and alternative media, media and mediation are crucial objects and processes in the ongoing reflexive formation and re-evaluation of self-identity and social practices. Though art in the sense of "high art" or "the fine arts" has historically been distinguished from media, Bourdieu (1993) highlights the

functional role of this distinction or "misrecognition" (1993, p. 75) in the maintenance of power, illustrating the these fields, though to some extent autnonomous, are predicated less on a fundamental difference in kind or nature than one of power and position. Downing, in turn, similarly supports the mutual consideration of these historically separated fields of cultural production, saying that by considering communication, art and media together, we "do not fall into the trap of segregating information, reasoning, and cognition from feeling, imagination, and fantasy'" (2001, p.52)

When one examines the work within these two fields, in particular, those of "art" and "alternative media," the shared characteristics, functions and transformative potential of both become increasingly evident, lending value to the use of an understanding of "art as media" as a speculative theoretical perspective. Such an approach touches upon what Papastergiadis (2012) and Meskimmon (2010) acknowledge as the unique affordances of the arts in the process of imagination - that art has a power beyond representation to assist in the construction of knowledge and new ways of being in the world. The mutually informative potential of these bodies of literature is perhaps best illustrated by Walter Benjamin's work, which is drawn upon in both areas of scholarship. Benjamin argues that the study of arts media and society **"**has absolutely no use for such rigid, isolated things as: work, novel, book. It has to insert them into the living social context" (1973, p. 69). When placed in such a "living context" one must move beyond a strictly textual understanding of a work of art, and recognize what alternative media scholar John Downing identifies as one of Benjamin's most valuable contributions – the need to examine "the impact [of art] in

terms of interactivity, of a dialogical 'looking' and interrogation rather than a hegemonic relationship" (2001, p. 61).

The influence of Benjamin's perspective is evident throughout alternative media scholarship. In particular, it can be seen in Christopher Atton's definition, which highlights that transformative potential of alternative media which, he argues is rooted in its ability to reflexively aid communication within a social context in a manner and allow for the practice of alterity and/or differentiated power relations within communicative processes (2002, p. 25). Based upon Atton's definition and the utilization of an art as media theoretical approach, it is not unrealistic to define KPC as an alternative media producer, especially when one considers its articulated desire to inspire, develop and encourage artistic community in Sofia and the belief of its creator that "art is something capable of pushing you to deploy ideas that make ripples" (Boyanova, 2014). The facilitation of change and the manifestation of alterity in art, identity, and social relations is an undeniable element of KPC's metamodern program, and resonates strongly with Atton's perspective, as well as a notion of the artist as "media producer" and a potential agent of transformative social change. As such, this chapter attempts to explore the previously identified elements of metamodernism by utilizing alternative media theory in order to delineate the processes, practices and structures through which these characteristics are embodied or manifested.

A General Overview of Klaxon Press Collective

The Klaxon Press Collective is a distinctly multi-dimensional organization that takes a unique multi-platform and collaborative approach in attempting to produce its publications, as well as develop and galvanize its local community. By publishing their

works both digitally and in print, KPC seeks to bring together both a broader international and locally based readership for the purposes of furthering public discussion and debate ("Letter from the editors", 2014). The website expands upon the journal's artistic contents, including press interviews and news articles, current events, and cultural commentary provided in the KP Collective's blog and press section. Beyond the digital realm, the community within Sofia is further engaged through KPC hosted events and collaborations with other local organizations. KPC actively voices support for other artistic organizations and encourages attendance at sponsored art events and spaces, as well as the public events they host themselves (with the help of both public and privatized economic support from a range of sponsors). As of December 2014, Klaxon has both organized and been involved in a several events, ranging from more traditional art exhibitions to experiential performance art collaborations. Thus far, their collaborators include SoHo - a workspace for "freelancers, entrepreneurs, and other creative professionals," Kokimoto (aka Kaloyan Iliev) – a "multidisciplinary artist from Varna", Betahaus Sofia – "a co-working space for creatives in Downton Sofia", Absolute Vodka – "a Swedish brand of vodka" that partnered with Klaxon in their presentation of Kokimoto's exhibition "Spiritual Trip", and the St. Kliment Ohridksi University of Sofia ("Collaborations," 2014).

Klaxon Press Collective's dual emphasis on multi-platform textual production and community engagement reflect the initial formative impulses of its founder Monica Georgeiff, who originally envisioned the project as a communally produced zine. Such a format is ideal for the promotion of metamodernism, for as suggested by Duncombe's work on zines and zine culture, when applied on a micro-level, or within a small

community, this blend of textual production and community collaboration can play a major role in the self-reflexive project of individual and communal identity articulation and negotiation. This is largely because,

> The medium of zines is not just a message to be received, but a model of participatory cultural production and organization to be acted upon. The message you get from zines is that you should not just be getting messages, you should be producing them as well. This is not to say that the content of zines...is not important. But what is unique, and uniquely valuable, about the politics of zines and underground culture is their emphasis on the practice of doing it yourself. It's a simple idea, but in a society where consuming what others have produced for you - whether it be culture of politics - is the norm, the implications are far-reaching and radical, for doing it yourself is the first premise of participatory democracy. (Duncombe, 2008, p. 135)

The manner in which zines are, by definition, a participatory production, manifests Benjamin's argument that legitimately creating change, via the media, would require that emphasis must be placed on transforming passive consumers into producers of media (1973). While this may not necessarily equate to dramatic shifts in power dynamics, as an approach, it successfully transcends theory and action "based solely on consciously managed discourse" and instead, productively addresses, "deeply held and embodied dispositions; an ethos, and ultimately a way of life" (Crossley, 2002, p. 142-143).

Within Bulgaria's media market, which is geared towards mass communication and continues to struggle with corruption, a small non-profit organization such as Klaxon Press Collective is a clear outlier. Though comprised of many journalists, Klaxon Press clearly distances itself from the politicized realm of journalism, instead deciding to form as an art collective and small press. Upon review of the state of journalism in Bulgaria and the threat it poses to journalists themselves, this distancing certainly has its affordances (safety being

one of them). However, even in its role as a producer of artistic or cultural goods, Klaxon appears as a breath of fresh air within the Bulgarian mediascape. Reflecting a zine-like ethic which encourages individuals to contribute to cultural production, and with a structure that is comparatively transparent and participatory, Klaxon embodies a very different kind of media engagement that facilitates a different understanding of the relationship between media production and consumption. As it is not mass-produced, is available free of charge, and sourced in a participative manner, Klaxon Press has the potential to imagine, engage, and manifest a different kind of local community, with its own practices.

However, questions remain about the viability of such a project and its potential for impact upon a grander scale. Doubts about the efficacy of zine politics beyond the small groups within which they generally circulate, neither correspond with, nor bode well for KPC's hopes for a "second national revival" of the Bulgarian community. Duncombe (2008) clearly acknowledges the shortcomings of zines and their politics, pointing out the way that zine and associated underground aesthetics are quickly co-opted into the mainstream and made to serve the ends of mass media. Despite this, he maintains that such challenges do not fully undermine the realities of the existence and experiences afforded by zine culture, as the threat of co-optation and contradiction does not exhaust the value of the communities, identities, and practices that zines and zine culture facilitate on a small scale, in particular the spaces for imagining alterity that they provide (Duncombe, 2008). Furthermore, developing literature regarding the use of culture for urban development and transformation suggest the potentially powerful role of "creative" communities, aesthetics,

the arts or other forms of cultural production practices in structuring value and transforming space and industry on a broader scale.

While much debate surrounds ideas concerning propositions such as Richard Florida's "Creative Class" it is necessary to address its primary elements as Klaxon Press' staff is identified as a team constituted of a "creative elite" (Team, 2014). Many of KPC's members have professional background in the arts and design ("The Team", 2014). Unlike the definitively amateur zine communities discussed by Duncombe, KPC is comparatively highly professionalized. This should not necessarily be viewed as undermining their alterity though, for within the Bulgarian context, professionals within these fields are a minority that is currently fighting for recognition within Bulgarian society ("co-working", 2012). This blend of professionalism and alternative metamodern vision coalesces within KPC's artistic endeavors (as illustrated in Chapter Two) and illustrates how the power to create an image, text, or artifact enables the articulation and reification of self-identity (Duncombe, 2008, p. 42). Via their live events and collaborations, KPC's metamodern vision moves beyond the limitations of the text and is effectively networked and applied within Sofia for the purposes of creating artistic visibility and renegotiating notions of value and geographic space. Sharon Zukin, in her work *The Cultures of Cities,* highlights the potential viability of such an approach on a broader scale, stating that

> the cultural power to create an image, to frame a vision, of the city has become more important as publics have become more mobile and diverse, and traditional institutions – both social classes and political parties – have become less relevant mechanism of expressing identity. Those who create images stamp a collective identity … they are developing new spaces for public cultures. (1996, p. 3)

In speaking of public cultures, Zukin takes the small scale symbolic negotiation and identification processes at work in things like zine culture, and repositions them in relation to a broader scope, which views "public culture as a process of negotiating images that are accepted by large numbers of people" (1996, p. 10).

As illustrated in Chapter One, aesthetics, the arts, and cultural production have historically been deployed within Bulgaria for the purposes of creating public culture under the Communist regime. The employment of cultural resources as a form of control reflects Zukin's assertion that "culture is also a powerful means of controlling cities. As a course of images and memories, it symbolizes 'who belongs' in specific places" (1996, p. 1). While political economy approaches have traditionally viewed culture as a result of material circumstances and practices, Zukin turns that logic on its head, with the aim not to diminish the economic and political role, but to point out the way in which culture functions as a crux within this system. Specifically, her concept of the symbolic economy recognizes the way in which "culture supplies the basic information – including symbols, patterns, and meaning – for nearly all the service industries ... Culture is intertwined with capital and identity in the city's production systems" (1996, p. 12). In understanding the aesthetic impact of communism within Bulgaria (and the far reaching impact of socialist realism not only on artistic production, but the physical and economic landscape of Sofia), Zukin's observations are extremely cogent. Conversely, although the area of culture can be controlled by hegemonic controlling forces, Zukin's approach suggests that culture can also become a space of intervention against such forces. If zine communites and groups like Klaxon Press Collective, through their personal construction, or re-presentation of

images, narratives, and other symbolic resources, are, in their own way, re-supplying the basic information for an alternative symbolic economy (in KPC's case, one which promotes metamodernism), Zukin's conceptualization affords (due to their role in negotiating symbolic value), cultural producers the power to impact spaces and social, political, and economic structures. As such, the following analysis examines the ways in which previously identified elements of metamodernity are manifested and engaged beyond KPC's published texts with an emphasis on how the Collective employs metamodern or "klaxist" ideas for the promotion of alterity or transformation within their community.

MANIFESTING THE METAMODERN

As previously stated, KPC's "klaxist" notion of metamodernism employs elements of both concepts in an attempt to address the specific milieu of issues faced within Bulgaria and realize a "metamodernity" that is appropriately adapted to a Bulgarian social context. Perhaps the most distinctly "modern" element of the metamodern imagined community that is manifested in the practices of KPC is the desire to utilize artistic engagement to strengthen the globally positioned *national* community. Artistic communities and movements have long been linked with the concept of modernity as Anderson (1982) reminds us, when he articulates the crucial role of cultural production and art in the formulation of the imagined community of the nation state. Perhaps unexpectedly, KPC's desire to further the creation of the nation state is often expressed in romantic and "bohemian" terms that are often framed as a counter to modernity. For example, when asked why she left Canada, and later, London to return to work in Sofia, KPC founder,

Monica Georgieff replies, “Frankly, I fell a little in love with Sofia as a place. Sofia has a spirit; something both humane, romantic and ruined, melancholy. Poetry. This particular thing I am not able to find it anywhere now (“Monica and Klaxon Press”, 2014). However, many scholars have pointed to the manner in which, though superficially contrary to the modern project of the nation state, romanticism and bohemia are, in fact, its natural extensions and corollaries. Lloyd, in his study of the contemporary invocation of the concept of “Bohemia” identifies “bohemia as a tradition of modernity” (2010, p. 266), while in their 2011 anthology entitled *Romanticism and Modernity,* editors Thomas Pfau and Robert Mitchel compile a compelling collection of works which position romanticism as a form of critical engagement with modernity that, though often critical in nature, furthers the modern project. In this sense, these spaces, which superficially seem to counter the modernist impulse, actually provide the opportunity to engage in the reflexive construction of self and community demanded by modernity (Giddens, 1991). The way in which these spaces facilitate critique and emotional reflection upon the processes of modernity play a crucial role in allowing individuals the opportunity to review its impact upon their lives and community, and to reassess and ameliorate the formulation of “progress” proposed within the modern framework.

The development and reification of a belief in the value of Sofia as a space with progressive potential and more broadly, the artistic potential of Bulgarian culture is a primary goal of Klaxon Press Collective. In fact, it was the recognition of such a value that initially spurred the development of the project. It is getting others to similarly embrace this sense of value and partake in the sense of a shared imagined community that presents

an obstacle for KPC. While her love for Sofia galvanizes Georgieff to mobilize the artistic elements of Bulgarian society, for her, the most interesting parts of the formation process of KP Collective were meetings with people around Bulgaria and the KPC team ("Monica and Klaxon Press, 2014). What Georgieff values most is the mutual recognition of the existence of an active society -- one in which she, and everyone else, can participate ("Monica and Klaxon Press", 2014) and it is this realization and participation that the events hosted by KP Collective are intended to facilitate. On a personal level, Georgieff is inspired by the transformation that can take place when "cool people gather in one place and they decide to collaborate" and says that to see her idea realized in such as way is nothing short of "incredible" ("Monica and Klaxon Press", 2014).

But learning to recognize the value within the local community is only the first step of this process, one that is followed by a reflexive assessment of needs and spaces where progress can be made most effectively. For Klaxon Press Collective, it is engagement in the artistic sphere that empowers, on a practical economic level, but also an emotional one, a belief in the possibility of national pride and eventual success in overcoming the challenges that have plagued their community. Such a belief is predicated not only on recognizing the affordances of the arts and the existence of a creative community within Sofia, but on the economic potential of this community. In describing her interactions with others upon telling them about KPC and her goal to foster "art as a business," Georgieff expresses that responses are "Almost always positive, but often with some reservations" ("Monica and Klaxon Press", 2014). While she realizes that such an approach is understandable "in a country which is constantly faced with political and economic

problems" she expresses her frustration that "it seems as though the culture is always last," when it is here that she actually perceives the most immediate potential for improving Bulgarian society ("Monica and Klaxon Press", 2014). In an interview with the Bulgarian Chronicle, she says as much, arguing that

> I think that the promotion of modern Bulgarian works abroad and at home would not only strengthen the spirit we have as a nation (sounds quite patriotic but it is), but also as a cultural society. [Bulgaria] in no way deserves to be [in the] back, especially as it comes to art. To prove that there is a market for and interest in our artists would be beneficial in many ways. ("Monica and Klaxon Press," 2014)

Thus, it was with both economics and cultural development in mind that KPC was founded – to serve as a reflexive learning space and a structuring institution for the realization of this artistic potential.

For KPC, creating a sense of community within the arts, and a pride in creative capacity is meant not only to boost morale, but to strengthen the metamodern vision of progress and the will to overcome a history of political apathy and disenchantment. Ultimately, the artistic program of KPC hopes to have positive impact on the formation of a proud metamodern community which bests its current political and economic challenges and pursues national success within a contemporary global economic context. Georgieff believes that, on a grand scale, such a project is dependent upon the return of other talented young people to Bulgaria after they complete their education (Mihaylov, 2014), but she remains determined and optimistic. Constantly inspired by the fact that within "every corner of Bulgaria lies so many talented people without the ability to express themselves" (Mihaylov, 2014), Georgieff founded KPC with a firm commitment to making a difference

within the country. While the task is certainly a large one, and she admits that, though an important one, art is only one piece of the puzzle, she will not be dissuaded by the pessimistic outlooks of others – for when "when I hear that someone is not of my opinion [and] such people there will be, for me that is the best fuel" (Mihaylov, 2014).

GLOCALITY & METAMODERNITY

In line with the KPC Journal's emphasis on the locale of Sofia and its relationship to the rest of the world, the Collective's goals and practices are also engaged in the re-presentation and re-orientation of the city, both literally and symbolically. The efforts of KP Collective illustrate Richard Lloyd's assessment of what he calls the "postmodern urban condition", in which "new patterns of production characterize the city and its neighborhoods, with a larger role for culture and technology" (2010, p. 14). Within Sofia, these new patterns are established by artists and cultural producers like the Klaxon Collective, and can be as simple (though still fundamental) as the production of a bi-lingual print publication. By choosing to present both their print and digital journal, as well as their web content in English and Bulgarian, KPC renegotiates cultural and linguistic ties within Sofia by engaging the local and international affordances of both languages. This is a foundational value of the organization that is expressed within its production – a value that is based upon a pragmatic glocal reality.

On their website, KPC presents their case for bi-linguality, and privileging the development of a website in English before developing one in Bulgarian (though the majority of web-content on the blog and press pages is available in both languages) on a page entitled **"**Why is our website in English?" Their reasons are the following: "I. We

want to open the submissions to international writers. II. It makes us a more global platform, III. We don't have the resources to develop a multilingual website (but it is one of our priorities!)" (**"**Why is our website in English?", 2014). In some respects, the decision to create an organization that is fundamentally supporting the production of bi-lingual content, best illustrates the goals of Klaxon Press to maintain a distinct local identity, but one that is engaged more broadly beyond the local and available to the global community.

Such an approach makes a statement about the inclusive aims of KPC in relation to the community that they hope to support. As noted by David Block in his 2004 study about internet language use, "those who have no knowledge of English at all are still disadvantaged since, to get to the web page in one's own language, the user has to know the Roman alphabet in order to be able to type and read web addresses" (p. 30). While the ease of access for speakers of Slavic languages in which the Cyrillic alphabet is used (like Bulgarian), has increased since 2004, bilingualism still plays an important role in allowing one to gain access business and communication. In the case of Klaxon Press, the Collective itself notes on their website that due to scarce resources, they have chosen to prioritize their development of English content over content in Bulgarian. While the disparity between the availability of content in both languages on the group's website is not extreme, all of the text indicating page titles and assisting in the navigation of the website by users (i.e. headings such as, "about us", "What we do", etc.) is presented in English. While a strong knowledge of the English language, is, in many respects a marker of privilege within Bulgaria (many of the top schools in the country are "language schools" which students must score highly on exams to attend) (Field notes, 2011), KPC nevertheless presents their

content in a way that encourages cross-cultural and cross-linguistic sharing, rather than linguistic or cultural exclusivity. Their dedication to this is evident in their efforts to translate the artistic works submitted to their journal. Submissions to Klaxon can be in either English or Bulgarian, and are then translated (primarily by the group's Creative Director, Monica Georgieff) into the other language. While translation is by no means an easy task, translating works of poetry, prose, and short story requires a particular sensitivity to cultural differences, authorial intent, and other specifically artistic details. According to Klaxon, "All translation will be done with consideration of the author of the original work" – once again reiterating their slogan "you make the art, we do the legwork" ("Letter from the editors", 2014).

Despite their efforts to create and facilitate exchange between the local and global, KP Collective has also weathered the problematic structural realities of such an arrangement. In a 2014 interview with Kreativen.com, Georgieff discussed the process of founding and structuring KP Collective, and the challenges that distance posed to forming a functional organization. Georgieff, a dual citizen of Canada and Bulgaria, was initially inspired to form Klaxon Press while in Canada thanks to a Canadian organization (Boyanova, 2014). She then continued her studies in London, but established and continued to work with KP Collective in Sofia, commuting both physically and electronically whenever possible. This increasingly became a serious challenge for the organization, as she points out in the interview (though with a sense of humor), "Link distance is always difficult. We are the most active, while I'm on location in Sofia - something began to happen more often, since I moved to Europe. Before I was in Canada and snowshoes just

did not allow me such mobility" (Mihaylov, 2014). According to Georgieff, the team continued to grow over the months following her presentation of her ideas (Boyanova, 2014), and while, as a young organization, KPC seemed able to maintain their activities with the help of Skype calls, Georgieff recognized that growth would be predicated on centralizing the group together within Sofia (Mihaylov, 2014). This continued to be a major concern when I initially contacted KP Collective to offer my services as an English language editor (a role that I had previously performed for another arts and culture magazine during my Fulbright grant). Though grateful for the offer of assistance, Monica had recently relocated from London to Bulgaria to limit the need for international telecommuting within the organization. Thus, it became clear that I was quite literally not in the geographic position to be as helpful as I had hoped. Overall, it is evident that KP Collective's engagement with the glocal characteristics of the metamodern identity extend beyond the symbolic elements of its published literary works. To the contrary, they are physically and socially manifested through the production of inclusively bi-lingual content and the very real negotiation of geographic locales, both physically and digitally.

MANIFESTING METAMODERNITY'S PROGRESSIVE POLITICS

Histories of Resistance

The progressive politics exhibited within the KPC Journal are also evident within the organization's structure and practices. Specifically, they can be seen in the decision to organize KPC as an art collective, the manner in which the structure of their published works engage a brief, but important history of literature as political engagement within Bulgaria, the participatory structures and processes the group uses to source its content,

and its collaboration and coverage of other "creative" organizations and their politicized endeavors.

By forming as an art collective which has specific aims for the promotion and transformation of particular values, KPC subtly draws upon an impressive lineage of artpolitical movements and collectives. In discussing the relationship between art and media, and in particular, art's contributions to the field of alternative media, Downing cites the role of artistic movements and collectives ranging from Dadaism to the Situationists in facilitating the reconceptualization of the relationship between these fields. In particular, he notes that collectives such as the Situationists and their predecessors "foregrounded art as a form of public, political communication, and in certain ways, although very distinct, each formation was heir to the previous one" (Downing, 2001, p. 57). Art collectives such as The Situationists or the Dadaists have historically been rooted in the intelligentsia and have often created highly theoretical or philosophic manifestos or approaches to convey their conceptualization of the role of art and media within society. For example, the concept of "detournement," as employed by the Situationists, perfectly exemplifies a highly theorized understanding of the application of the arts towards societal ends. Detournement, in particular operated "by redeploying official language … [and] employing official visual imagery to subvert the established order. It is the revolutionary counterpart to recuperation, a subversive plagiarism that diverts the spectacle's language and imagery from its intended use" (Downing, 2001, p. 59).

Artistic traditions of cultural resistance in Bulgaria are not dissimilar, though they do take their own unique approach, as influenced by their socio-political, and cultural

context. While, Downing critiques any approach which strictly delineates art from media (returning to Benjamin's argument (1973) that art and media should not be separately categorized), Benjamin's case is particularly pertinent to the historical aesthetic traditions engaged by Klaxon Press, since, in making his case, "Benjamin joined ranks with the Soviet constructivist artists of the early 1920s….in celebrating the combined political and aesthetic potential of … then-novel technologies" like photography (Downing, 2001, p. 60). As illustrated in Chapter One, within the communist environment, the recognition of the capacity of political aesthetics to structure environments, activities, identities, and beliefs had a profound impact upon Sofia's landscape and its inhabitants. The fact that Benjamin turned to a Soviet Russian press as an example of one which through a recasting of purpose and roles, "affects the conventional distinction between genres, between writing and poet, between scholar and popularizer, but also revises even the distinction between author and reader" (Benjamin, 1973, p. 72) suggests that KPC has potentially evolved from a unique trajectory and fusion of international inspiration and local media processes. While Soviet political aesthetics clearly had an impact within Bulgaria, these manifested in manners that were specific to Sofia and its socio-cultural dynamics. In order to understand these, we must return to the brief, but important role of theoretical discourse and literary production within what, under communism, was understood as "unofficial" culture – i.e. cultural resistance.

While Klaxon Press Collective identifies itself as a non-profit organization and cites NGOs as one of the positive agents of change within their contextual manifesto, they do not espouse any explicitly political affiliation or program, limiting their focus strictly to

the cultural realm, but positioning themselves as part of a zeitgeist of change in Bulgarian culture. When placed within a Bulgarian context, it becomes clear that regardless of whether or not Klaxon Press has political leaning or aims, articulating them as such would be hugely counterproductive. Within Bulgarian discourse (as illustrated by the 2013 protests) political affiliation can become a serious liability. Thus, one cannot directly assume that the lack of explicit politics in Klaxon's articulation of its identity and its context equates to a lack of desire for political change or engagement. As such, an attempt to position Klaxon Press Collective directly in relation to the state, and to understand the dialogue and relation between these two actors cannot be successfully executed strictly through an examination of manifest content or discussion. Only by taking a multi-methodological approach that is sensitive to discourse and cultural history can we understand the complexity of the cultural politics of KP Collective.

Upon first reading the organization's blog, one of the more strikingly unusual aspects of Klaxon Press Collective is the highly theoretical way in which they frame their own understanding of their socio-political context and cultural role as an art collective and small press. In order to grasp the value of this approach, it is necessary to engage Klaxon Press in its own terms, keeping in mind the artpolitical environment constituted by communism and exploring the intellectual legacy that it has left behind. In line with the approach taken by Klaxon Press Collective in its efforts to convey the Bulgarian cultural context, Albena Lutzkanova-Vassileva characterizes the "end of totalitarian terror" (i.e. the end of the Communist regime) in Bulgaria as "taking a theoretical turn"(2009, p. 133). It is not difficult to identify the parallels between this theory-based cultural tradition of

resistance and the rhetoric of Klaxon Press Collective. Rooted in the arts and with a well-educated (and largely internationally educated) staff, Klaxon Press Collective is similarly constructed to facilitate a participatory and potentially multi-glossic discourse within a media environment that, while not dominated by communism, is struggling to free itself from corrupt political and monopolizing influences. Also in line with the standards set by Bulgarian "unofficial culture" is the fact that the organization "never yields, however, to the temptation to attack or criticize the system directly" (Todorov, 1995, p. 147) but instead places its faith in the power of artistic expression and dialogue. For if Todorov is correct in his assertion that, within such an artpolitical environment, "Reality strives to live up to the beautiful slogans and continually adjusts to the shifting rhetoric" of those in power, then the arts provide a valuable tool for intervention. If that is the case, then within such a space, it is "the producers of this rhetoric – the writers who coin the words and control the names – thus turn into the true masters of reality. The aesthetic models they create serve as miniatures of the political system, as prototypes of the state" (Todorov, 1995, p. 146).

When contextualized within traditions of Bulgarian "unofficial culture," the theoretical approach of Klaxon Press Collective (and its apparent lack of official political affiliation) takes on a completely different set of meanings – appearing not as unusual, but as a potential contemporary extension of a local form of cultural resistance calling for cultural and social change. Moreover, an examination of Bulgarian traditions of artistic or intellectual resistance, as well as the recognition of the impact and implications of viewing communism as an artpolitical environment, suggests that what lies at the heart of dissent within such an artpolitical space is a battle over the symbolic representation of the

Bulgarian communal identity and narrative, as it is constituted by history, language, political and cultural narrative. More importantly (for the purposes of this study), it is evident that the mass media, the state, the arts, samizdat, and the intelligentsia have always played crucial, if not competitive, roles in this process of self-iteration, cultural identification, and identity realization through symbolic production.

Participatory Infrastructure

However, to return to the structural elements of KP Collective in the present day, KP Collective's infrastructure is, to a large extent reflective of what Duncombe (2001) and Benjamin (1973) would consider progressive culture. Specifically, KP Collective, by aiding collaboratively in the publishing process and seeking to collaborate with their audience, attempts to 'transcend the specialization in the process of production." For Duncombe and Benjamin, genuinely progressive culture 'is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers - that is, readers or spectators into collaborators" (2008, p. 133). In forming as a collective rather than a more traditional hierarchical publishing group, publication is a more egalitarian and open process, where the barriers between producers and consumers are comparatively permeable.

With the aim to inspire artistic production within Bulgaria, KPC's solicitation process differs from other publications in that it seeks submissions from youth and up and comers, those who might not be published elsewhere, and those that perhaps are not yet considered "professionals" in their field. It is less of a top-down editorial process by which content is determined through explicit criteria, and more so one of flexibility and dialogue with the community it seeks to support. In soliciting contributions, Klaxon Press only

requires that artistic works, or their authors, bear some relation to Sofia, or Bulgaria, rather than dictating a particular focus, format, or topic ("Submission Guidelines", 2014). Unfortunately, KPC does not clearly describe its editorial process on its website, and, despite attempting interviews, time constraints prevented the organization from providing any insight into editorial decision making. Should further research on KPC be conducted, this is one oversight that would, ideally, be corrected. However, in general, like zine culture, KP Collective aims to inspire by showing the artistic potential within its local community, and in doing so, provides a more open forum for young individuals to contribute to this dialogue in whatever artistic medium they see fit. By openly sourcing contributions, and more specifically, previously unpublished works from the public ("Submission Guidelines", 2014), KPC makes space for novel ideas and burgeoning artists and encapsulates yet another element of zine culture - the manner in which it can "provide the medium for all people to be intellectuals - cultural creators - and this itself is a radical act" (Duncombe, 2008, p. 188).

Although geographic, financial, and time constraints of this study rendered individual interviews with KPC staff and participatory ethnographic observation of KP Collective's events impossible, the documentary evidence covering these events that is present on their website, reaffirms the way in which these progressive politics and their associated participatory practices are a key part of the organization's artistic collaborations and live events. Klaxon's blog content displays the distinctly progressive nature of the organization's collaborations – detailing their affiliation with groups like co-working hub Betahaus, politicized artist Kaloyan Iliev (Marteeva, 2014), and their support of

independent publishers, public art spaces and groups such as "Secret Radio" – all of which infer a progressive political bent. In fact Klaxon's first ever blog post, archived in December 2012, provides protest coverage, as offered by Creative Director Monica Georgieff, which details her experiences interning at Betahaus, during which the organization became intensely involved in public protest. According to Georgieff's coverage of the event, Betahaus "managed to support the ongoing protestors in front of the Bulgarian parliament after, as well as during, their normal work hours" by "relocating the operations of their members and other professionals to the centre of the action" ("Co-working," 2012). To do so, the Betahaus community "set up camp in the core of downtown Sofia's ministry buildings" and maintained their "regular nine-to-five workday outdoors while at the same time contributing to the efforts to effectively shift the status quo" in order to "dispel one of the most prominent pro-government campaigns, namely that most of those protesting against them are not professionals and therefore not qualified enough to express an opinion" ("Co-working," 2012). In his study of "Creative" work and bohemia, Lloyd identifies beliefs like those expressed by the Bulgarian government as aligned with "A perception of what constitutes 'real' work, formed during the industrial period" that privileges manual labor and blue-collar professions, and even continues to shape the views of "stubborn" social scientists (Lloyd, 2010, p. 183). While Klaxon itself was not an active organization at the time, the fact that this post is the blog's first, and that Klaxon Collective participants identify as non-traditional professional "creatives" implies a degree of progressive political solidarity and illustrates the fact that while "creatives" might be

privileged in more affluent Western nations, pursuing such a line of work in Bulgaria is an uphill battle, and one with clear political connotations.

Similarly, Klaxon has also supported a variety of politicized artists and, as illustrated by the pro-working protests, politicized creative practices. These have included the showing of works by artist Kaloyan Iliev, whose artwork lends itself towards the political to the extent that his exhibition in Varna was shut down (Timeart, 2014; Marteeva, 2014), as well as continued support of other non-traditional presses and creative organizations. In particular, KP Collective is very supportive of independent publishers. This is indicated by their blog post "Indie Publishers are the Cats Pajamas," in which they proclaim their love of material books (as opposed to e-books), but laud the democratizing potential of independent and online publishers which offer more accessible and participatory frameworks for media production ("Indie Publishers", 2012).

KPC has also worked with artistic organizations which, while perhaps less explicitly political, similarly engage in "This radical cultural practice of turning 'spectators into collaborators'" (Duncombe, 2008, p. 133-134). In particular, they support one event which seeks to subvert what Guy Debord would have identified as something akin to the *Society of the Spectacle* (1967/2000), a local artistic endeavor by a group entitled "Secret Radio" whose first "performance initiative … allowed a sample of its audience to transform themselves into secret agents in one of the most public places in the city milieu - a large shopping centre (the so-called, mall)" (Mircheva, "Secret Radio"). Reminiscent of the Situationists, "Secret Radio" reflects a politicized artistic perspective, and its leader Stefan Shterev, describes it as a "mission to shuffle layers in the social consciousness and in

perception" (Mircheva, "Secret Radio"). Klaxon's description of the event highlights the social power politics at play in such an endeavor, stating that

> A little bit in the style of 1984, the life of the contemporary citizen occurs under constant observation and various types of control. Each day, we send out information through our mobile messages, credit cards and e-mails without the certain knowledge of where that data might end up. Minimizing the distance between the unknown 'secret services' and ourselves would facilitate the much-needed transparency in the social sphere. At the end of the day, we are not subjects to be observed, instead we are the core of the society within which we operate. (Mircheva, "Secret Radio")

Within collaborations such as these, the progressive, albeit generally strictly artistically expressed politics of Klaxon Press Collective come to the fore.

METAMODERN CREATIVITY

As illustrated by their coverage of the Betahaus "pro-working" or protest-working, Klaxon is also dedicated to manifesting, through its practices and events, an increasingly creative community. Their articulation of "creativity," which in the literary journal is associated with youth, potential, and artistic production, is far more pragmatic as it regards the organization's practices and goals. In particular, they connect social manifestations of "creativity" with professional and economic development. This is certainly not unprecedented as, within the contemporary context (be it articulated either as "high modernity" or as a symptom of a "postmodern" and "post-industrial" condition),

> Culture has necessarily expanded to the point of where it has become virtually coextensive with the economy itself, not merely as the symptomatic basis of some of the largest industries in the world - tourism now exceeding all the other branches of global employment - but much more deeply, as every material object and immaterial service becomes inseparably a sign and vendible commodity. (Perry Anderson, 1998, p. 55)

Within such a context, "The artists themselves form an available labor pool with the aesthetic competencies required to meet this new demand" (Lloyd, 2010, p. 225) and bohemian types begin to function as "trade missionaries" (Cowley, 1934/1976). Contemporary scholarship regarding the existence and economic role of so called "cultural intermediaries" (Bourdieu, 1993; Miller, 2014; Maguire, 2014a/2014b; Kuipers, 2014; Negus, 2002) reiterates the potential of the economic capacity of artists and critics, especially within the general program espoused in popular theories of regional development, such as those of Richard Florida, in his 2002 bestseller *The Creative Class*, and 2008's *Who's Your City*. However, approaches such as Florida's deserve thorough examination and demand complication via the recognition of the role of context and the power relations in "creative" regional development.

In the case of Sofia, Bulgaria, the observations of Venelin Ganev in his study of the borsa's black market community prove far more relevant to the role of cultural producers and Bourdieusian "distinction". In contrast to the works of Florida, which emphasize the creation of economic value in a manner that generally reinforces the hegemonic status quo (Florida, 2013), Ganev (2014b) insightfully points out the way in which cultural consumption and distinction can be employed as a means developing alternative or counterhegemonic constructions of value. According to Ganev, Bourdieu's understanding that "'art and cultural consumption' fulfill 'a social function in legitimating social differences'… illuminates the politics of the borsa rather well" as "In Soviet-type dictatorships, any attempt to legitimate differences other than those officially sanctioned by the authorities contained an element of resistance" (2014, p.533). As such, "the creation

of distinction at the borsa was much more emphatic and defiant" because "it was propelled not by the consumption of cultural spectacles with indeterminate political content… but by the appropriation of an aesthetic phenomenon unambiguously associated with the west and therefore denounced as alien" (2014, p.533). The employment of Bourdieusian "distinction" in this case aided in the formation of an alternative community by accentuating "the detachment of a group of like-minded people from the values and hierarchies of status that constituted the ideological armature of Soviet-style socialism – and attest[ing] to their determination to interact with the system that surrounded them, not on its terms but their own" (2014b, p.533).

Though not directly engaging the concept of the "creative" industry or class, Zukin does explicate the root of their transformative potential - their "symbolic capital of vision" (1996, p.150). She describes this "symbolic capital" as being formed by a convergence of the playful capacities of the imagination, individual and communal belief, contextualized experience, and, I would add, group habitus. However, I would reiterate my critique of view that the aims of "creatives" and groups such as KPC are merely a "shoring up" of their privileged position (Wright, 2005, p. 110) through the reproduction of social structures. Such a perspective, is exceptionally limited, especially in the case of KPC. Although a sense of distinction is clearly conveyed in the KPC team description (The Team, KPC), the structural and ideological openness to the work and involvement of hopeful amateurs belies a legitimate optimism for egalitarian transformation that contradicts such a perspective.

Despite the realities of privilege that have allowed for the evolution of groups such as KPC and its participants, we must also acknowledge the legitimacy of the emotional resonance of their identity, corresponding habitus, and work, both for themselves and within the community. For KPC's Creative Director, KPC is far more than just an economic project. Rather, it is a chance to meaningfully engage a familial legacy of habitus and identity, and to utilize her privileges to positively contribute to her community. She says as much, when she personally discloses in an interview that,

> I have two passports - one Canadian, one Bulgarian. …But these tendencies were born long before myself; from my grandfather - who was a master of copper… my father and my grandfather are artists ... My whole family has been engaged in some kind of art; I write. I like that I'm the first person in my family who grew up abroad, and perhaps first among them, who can contribute to an alternative perspective to the possibilities for a Bulgarian who is involved in the arts.

When viewed in this light, Georgieff's statement that she often utilizes a quote from the newspaper Timeart.bg which called KPC a "hot link between literature, design and music…to summarize what [KPC] strives to be" and hopes, more precisely, for the organization to function as "'hot link' between the artists themselves and their audience" with the aim of developing a "new niche of Bulgarian art as a business" (Mihaylov, 2014) can be understood not as a diminishing hypocrisy that reveals the aims of the intelligentsia to reproduce hegemonic power structures, and instead, a pragmatic attempt at realizing a personal dream that is self-aware, but also complex in its re-negotiation of social power relations.

Such an emotional and personal engagement is arguably necessary to transcend barriers of cultural distance and difference, and to put in the sheer amount of work required

by a non-profit organization which publishes a journal that is available free of charge. It was Georgieff's privilege as a dual citizen that allowed her to encounter the Toronto company "which brought together artists from different disciplines to work together in disseminating and publishing their own works" and granted her the insight that such an organization did not exist in Bulgaria ("Monica and Klaxon Press", 2014). According to Georgieff, it is also this artistic habitus that unites the diverse group of people working within and collaborating with KPC,

> Even at an early stage we have a great variety of people who are somehow involved in the CP…. As art - designers, musicians, poets, writers, artists, journalists, rappers, bloggers, bartenders (and this is art!). As nationalities - Bulgarians, Irish, Canadians, Argentineans ... But what unites them is that all love to share their art and seek alternative formats to express and spread it. This is not an institution, it's fun. ("Monica and Klaxon Press", 2014)

While participants perhaps undeniably reap a profit of cultural capital from their involvement, we should not read this as mutually exclusive of also reaping the personal benefits of reflexive self-development and collaborative self-expression, or of the chance to engage others beyond traditional geographic, cultural and linguistic barriers. Most importantly, we should not lose sight of the fact that, despite the fact that KPC conducts itself within a post-communist environment, the impulse to form such independent and alternative group – like the rock and roll community of the borsa during the Communist Era has historically been laden with personal risk within Bulgaria, rather than prized as innovative or original. Thus, while it is joined to a desire to promote business development and national and local community pride, to view KPC's ideal of creativity within this context strictly as a self-serving economic or political strategy is to diminish the historical

contextual challenges and dangers faced by artists and cultural consumers, the crucial role of shared habitus in acting as a "solvent" of historical "doxa" (Wacquant, 2004) by providing a sense of emotional legitimacy and social cohesion, and finally, the public orientation of the revitalization projects that KPC supports within the city of Sofia.

In fact, KPC's creative re-imagining of Sofia and its community is perhaps most obviously realized in their support and participation in large public events, publicly accessible installation art showings, and projects such as Undergara. This project aims to physically realize the aforementioned desire of KPC for increased visibility of Sofia and Bulgaria's creative community by transforming a "currently drab underpass" (that KPC identifies as a "presently disliked" and "dangerous" space) within the central train station into an "artistic meeting point" (Vladimirova). Such a project embodies Zukin's observation that within "the symbolic economy every effort to rearrange space in the city is also an attempt at visual re-presentation. …Creating a public culture involves both shaping public space for social interaction and constructing a visual representation of the city" (Zukin, 1996, p. 24). Here, we can finally examine the confluence between the creative work within the KPC journal which provides personal visions of Sofia, and the physical processes of revitalization, restoration, and re-presentation of actual city spaces. In exploring confluences such as these between the artistic articulation of imagination and the physical process of re-presentation, we perceive that KPC is actively engaged in what Zukin argues are the two systems of production "that are crucial to a city's material life: the production of space, with its synergy of capital investment and cultural meanings, and

the production of symbols, which constructs both a currently of commercial exchange and a language of social identity" (1996, p. 24).

Through such rejuvenation of public space, as well as their own events and collaborations with groups such as Secret Radio, and Betahaus, KPC asserts their existence, and the existence of Bulgaria's creative potential, within Sofia and Bulgaria at large, effectively realizing their literary transformation and repositioning of Sofia in a physical way. This, as previously mentioned in the section on the modern nationalist project, is meant to develop art "as a business" within Sofia and encourage investment. Taking this into consideration, it is not surprising that one of the authors featured in the KPC journal (who is not a member of KPC himself) is involved in the promotion of Sofia for the 2019 European Capital of Culture (Contributors, 2014, p. 113). Such an endeavor, though different in the details, shares the overall goals of KPC to transform and recognize their community as culturally valuable. To accomplish this, however, is no easy task, for, as Zukin argues,

> A culture capital cannot just function as an entrepot of the arts. It must be a place where art is actually produced, as well as sold and consumed. The transformation of urban space into 'cultural space' depends on developing the two sides of cultural capital. It requires not only the material capital of cheap space and attractive buildings, an arts labor force, and financial investment in culture industries, but also the symbolic capital of vision – a vision of the city as a place where art, culture, and design are in the very air. It is also critical to have a large infrastructure of men and women whose job is to translate the work of cultural producers for a large public. (1996, p. 150)

Many of these traits, such as cheap space, attractive buildings (perhaps more so once artistically re-presented), and a burgeoning arts labor force, Sofia has in abundance. It is the goal of KPC to draw attention to this, with the aim of achieving further financial

investment, with the ultimate end of realizing the symbolic capital of vision they provide – the metamodern community that they have imagined.

CONCLUSION

A preliminary holistic analysis of the structures, practices, and goals of KP Collective illustrates that their artistic engagement has political ramifications that extend far beyond the printed page (or the lit screen) and furthermore, that these intentions are part of a critically conceived re-imagination of Sofia's, and more broadly, Bulgaria's political, social, and cultural potential. While some might dismiss the power of the arts in encouraging social transformation, the approach taken by Georgieff and KP Collective resonates powerfully with Zukin's observation that "If vision is a source of power in the symbolic economy, it is impossible to ignore the collective power of cultural producers" (1996, p. 151). Aware of the political and economic limitations imposed by history and the present day, KPC has recognized this power of cultural production, and sought to encourage the growth of an active, participatory community of such producers within Sofia, the very presence of which begins to manifest their metamodern re-imagined vision of the Bulgarian community. Since their formation KPC has sought to encourage the manifestation of this progressive metamodern imaginary through the collaborative and interactive community events, the geographic and linguistic re-presentation of Sofia within the international community, the re-imagination and repurposing of Sofia's landscape, and finally, continue to aspire to the development of an expressive, and economically dynamic, creative community.

Conclusion

Clearly, this study is by no means exhaustive. In fact, it raises as many questions as it answers. However, what I believe this explorative research has accomplished is providing basic answers to the overarching questions with which I began this study: *How does Klaxon Press Collective understand their context and the changes occurring within Bulgaria? How does they perceive their role within that context, and what future to they envision? Finally, how is KPC, through artistic engagement, articulating, re-imagining, and manifesting contemporary social and cultural change?*

My research on Klaxon Press Collective suggests that Bulgaria continues to struggle through Promenite, a challenging transition that requires an increased degree of reflexive engagement, for which KPC believes Bulgarian society was ill prepared. However, through promotion of their concept of metamodernism within the arts, KPC encourages the adoption of this reflexivity in order to successfully reconfigure and re-present the literal and figurative or symbolic legacies of Sofia's communist heritage, combat and transform a problematic inertial habitus, support economic development, and manifest social change via the imagination of an alternative local and national community -- one that can effectively function as an internationally recognized contemporary nation-state. Klaxon Press Collective endeavor to develop "art as a business" (Boyanova, 2014), simultaneously develops art as a space that within Bulgarian culture (due to its specific history of socio-political relations) uniquely affords legitimized reflexive exploration and construction of self-identity on an individual and communal level.

More specifically, according to KPC, the transition of the past two decades, though initially promising, has inculcated a political disenchantment that has less to do with the validity of the goal of manifesting a progressive reality, than with the understanding of the potential (or lack thereof) within the Bulgarian community for the successful realization of such a project. However, while "Bulgarians complaining" ("Post-postmodernism, 2012) has often been associated purely with unconstructive catharsis and community bonding, it is clear that within the past four years, there is a trend towards more direct and constructive engagement and intervention, though this has often been couched in culturally legitimized "indirect" terms. By this, I mean that it has not taken the perhaps more visible and expected Western route of the formation of distinct political parties and programs, instead (even in its political manifestations) representing a veritable cacophony of multitude that is bound together by a desire to express unique if highly differentiated experiences, needs, and goals.

The vision of the metamodern community articulated by Klaxon Press Collective within its works, structure, interactions, and events, binds this cacophonous multitude together with the recognition of and desire to overcome a particular condition – a condition which, though they recognize it as postmodern, is predicated upon the need for Bulgaria to find a means of negotiating the increased swiftness and scope of change occurring within their community and the world. To accomplish this task requires the new formulation, or re-imagination of the narrative and identity of their community – one which, being self-reflexive in nature, is able to effectively link the traditions and events of the past to the circumstances of the present, serves as a touchstone of communal cohesion and group identification, and empowers the community as confident, hopeful, and active agents in the

projection of their community successfully into the future. KPC's construction of metamodernism, and their presentation the metamodern imagined community is but one potential vision amongst many, but, in comparison to past articulations, it is set apart by the sheer degree of hope that it exudes. KPC's metamodern Sofia is one that is not idealized beyond its present circumstances, but one which is grounded in complicated present realities of change and transition. However, rather than fall into apathy, it instead engages the problems, and, via artistic process and dialogue, explores the ways in which these challenges may be overcome – eventually presenting a vision of a community that while not perfect, has begun to cope, and even has the potential to thrive as it adopts a modern, glocal, progressive, and creative self-identity.

For KPC, engagement with the arts provides distinct affordances for imagining, testing, and manifesting this metamodern communal self-identity within Bulgaria. While apathy and disenchantment has robbed the political process of hope and legitimacy, the arts retain power as a space of cultural expression, communication, and identity formation – constituting a field of comparatively amenable to the formation of "pure – relationships" that are un-besmirched by corruption, and therefore constitute a meaningful space for dialogue. Functioning as "experimental systems" (Schwab, 2010), the arts, as engaged by KPC are a space for the emergence and testing of new values and identities that, though perhaps initially constituted within or revolving around texts or artistic commodities, can move beyond these to impact the social sphere by impacting the modes of artistic, social, and cultural practice that surround and create them (Ganev, 2014b). By encouraging the transformation of consumers into producers, the reflexive construction of self-identity and

personal growth, the broadening of geographic and cultural horizons, the progressive engagement and negotiation of difference, and, perhaps most importantly the confidence in one's ability to impact and aid in the construction of a brighter future, the arts afford KPC the ability to not only represent, but construct and manifest new "modes of being and action in the world" (Papastergiadis, 2012, p. 12) or dispositions; the development of an increasingly innovative and engaged Bulgarian habitus.

Of course, there are caveats to this, including the question as to whether or not the realization of KPC's identity and project will be successful. As one small organization, KPC's metamodernism is undoubtedly one imaginary proposition among many (though one that they perceive as more broadly shared). While I argue that within this context, the arts afford the chance to re-imagine and reconstruct practices, this is a complicated and challenging process. In his concluding observations on zines, Stephen Duncombe keenly notes that "what zines offer is a magical resolution of the problems of capitalist society and mass culture" (2008, p. 200). He observes that in reality, the resolution of the problems is much more complicated, and that, at least in the case of zine culture, has largely led to the co-optation of the underground scene and its aesthetic by the forces of contemporary mainstream capitalism. He notes that Berthold Brecht, held similar concerns about the success of implementing social change through artistic means, saying that

> As a playwright, [Brecht] understood the immense potential of art in capturing the hearts and minds of people, yet as a radical he feared that political art, instead of politicizing people, would act as a sort of pressure release valve for dissatisfaction. He was concerned that people would mentally and emotionally resolve their political anxieties through culture, when the real resolution of these problems could only happen by confronting power in the political realm. (2008, p. 200)

While the 2013 protests within Sofia, and the development of constructive political engagement like "pro-working" (Co-working, 2012) leaves room for hope, this is by no means a guarantee of success. KPC is clearly comprised of a privileged group of individuals, many of which have had access to international high educations and experiences, and implicitly, relative economic stability and independence. Their theoretical approach to understanding and proposing change within Sofia is evidence of this privilege, and, in addressing the role of imagination and theory in inspiring social change, philosopher Charles Taylor differentiates the imaginary from social theory, stating that the imaginary is

> deeper than the intellectual themes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged way... I speak of imaginary because I'm talking about the way ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms; it is carried in images, stories, legends, and so on… [Comparatively] theory is often possessed by a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. (Taylor, 2007, p. 33)

But, acknowledging the challenges, and perhaps, the contradictions of privilege inherent in this approach does not merit its dismissal or condemnation, for while a theoretical approach may remain limited to a privileged few, Taylor acknowledges that it may also "inspire a new kind of activity with new practices, and in this way form the imaginary of whatever groups adopt these practices" (2007, p. 33).

We may question the power politics at play in such a transformation. Could it be that we are allowing for an imperialistic imposition of western concepts that serve only the privileged few into a space that, disadvantaged has few means to repel its powerful

advance? Perhaps, and I do not deny the elements of capitalism, Western thought or privilege at work in KPC's imagination of metamodernity. However, I do take heart in the conclusion of Charles Taylor, who, regarding this issues hold out hope, stating that theory may not only have an impact, but one tailored to local needs that retains the capacity to create legitimate change:

> For the most part, people take up, improvise, or are inducted into new practices. There are made sense of by the new outlook, first articulated in the theory; this outlook is the context that gives sense to the practices. Hence, the new understanding comes to be accessible to the participants in a way it wasn't before. It begins to defines the contours of their world and can eventually com to count as the take-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention. But this process isn't just one sided: a theory making over a social imaginary. The theory is glossed, as it were, given a particular shape as the context of these practices….becoming schematized when it is applied to reality in space and time, the theory is schematized in the dense sphere of common practice. (2007, p. 33)

Exploring the extent to which, over the coming year, such a process occurs within the community of Sofia is undoubtedly a premise for potential future research.

This project itself would be rightfully amended through further investigation and grounded (and potentially participatory) observation of KPC's live events, editorial and work practices, which would ideally be informed by more ethnographic interviews of its staff, collaborators, and event participants. Additionally, one could extend this project to include exploratory and eventually, comparative case studies of KPC and other organizations of its ilk within Sofia and throughout Bulgaria to better grasp the legitimacy and breadth of the zeitgeist that KPC describes. Longitudinal study of impact though difficult, could, with effort be devised in order to examine the extent to which metamodernity comes to shape life within Sofia. Given the opportunity and the funding, I

would hope to engage in such study, not only to better grasp the intricate relationships at work within the social, economic, cultural, political and artistic fields negotiated by KPC.

To conclude on a personal note, based upon my connections with former students, friends and colleagues I remain interested in pursuing further projects, and invested in the future of the community of Sofia. As such, though dedicated to a honest representation of my findings here and in future endeavors, it is my sincerest private hope that such projects would continue to illustrate the degree of hope for the future of Sofia and Bulgaria that is articulated by KPC and that, out of its present challenges, this community would emerge in a form that would be not only sustainable, but a source of personal pride for its inhabitants based upon the opportunities that the combination of its unique history, cultural outlook, and manifest egalitarianism would provide.

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